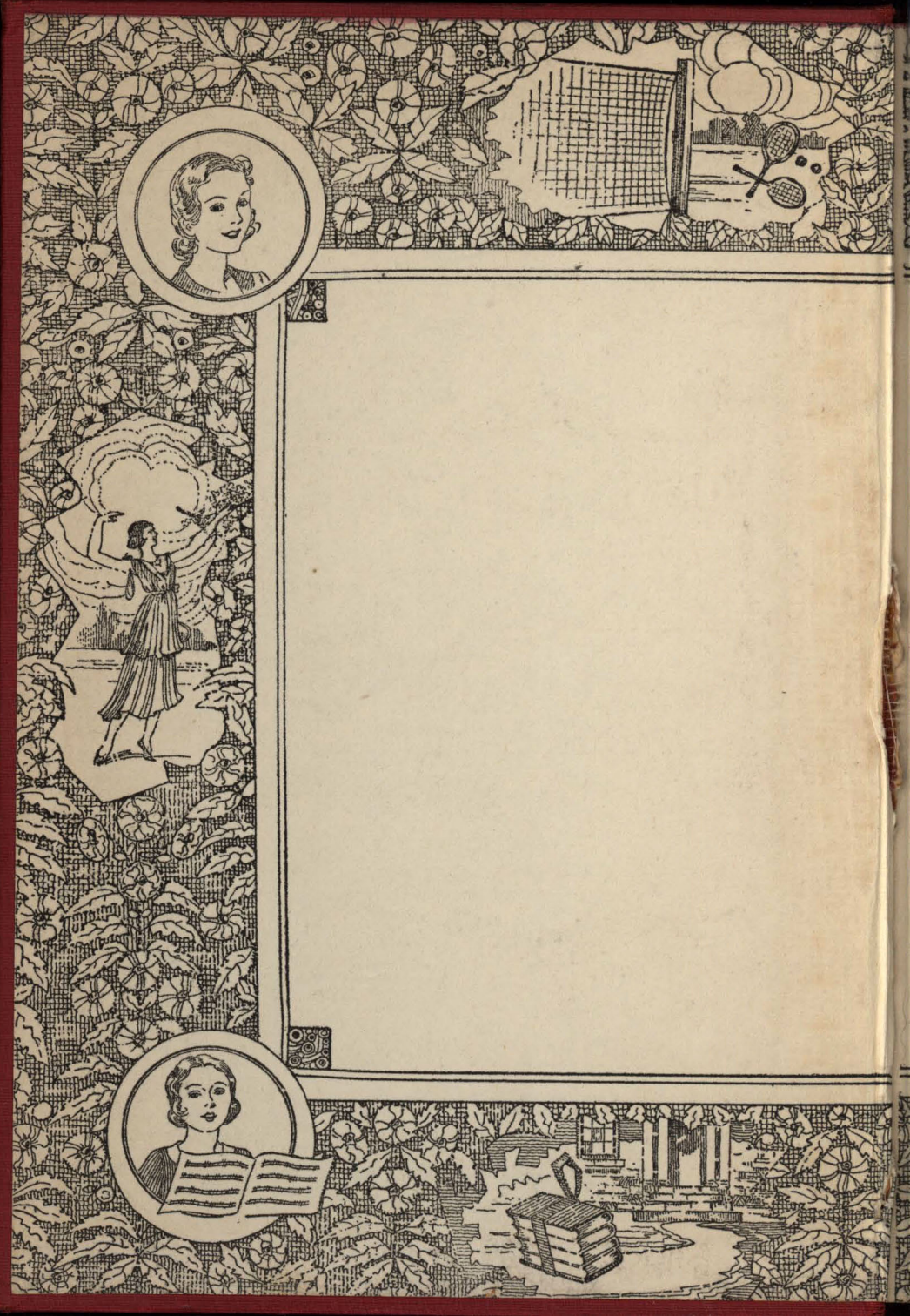
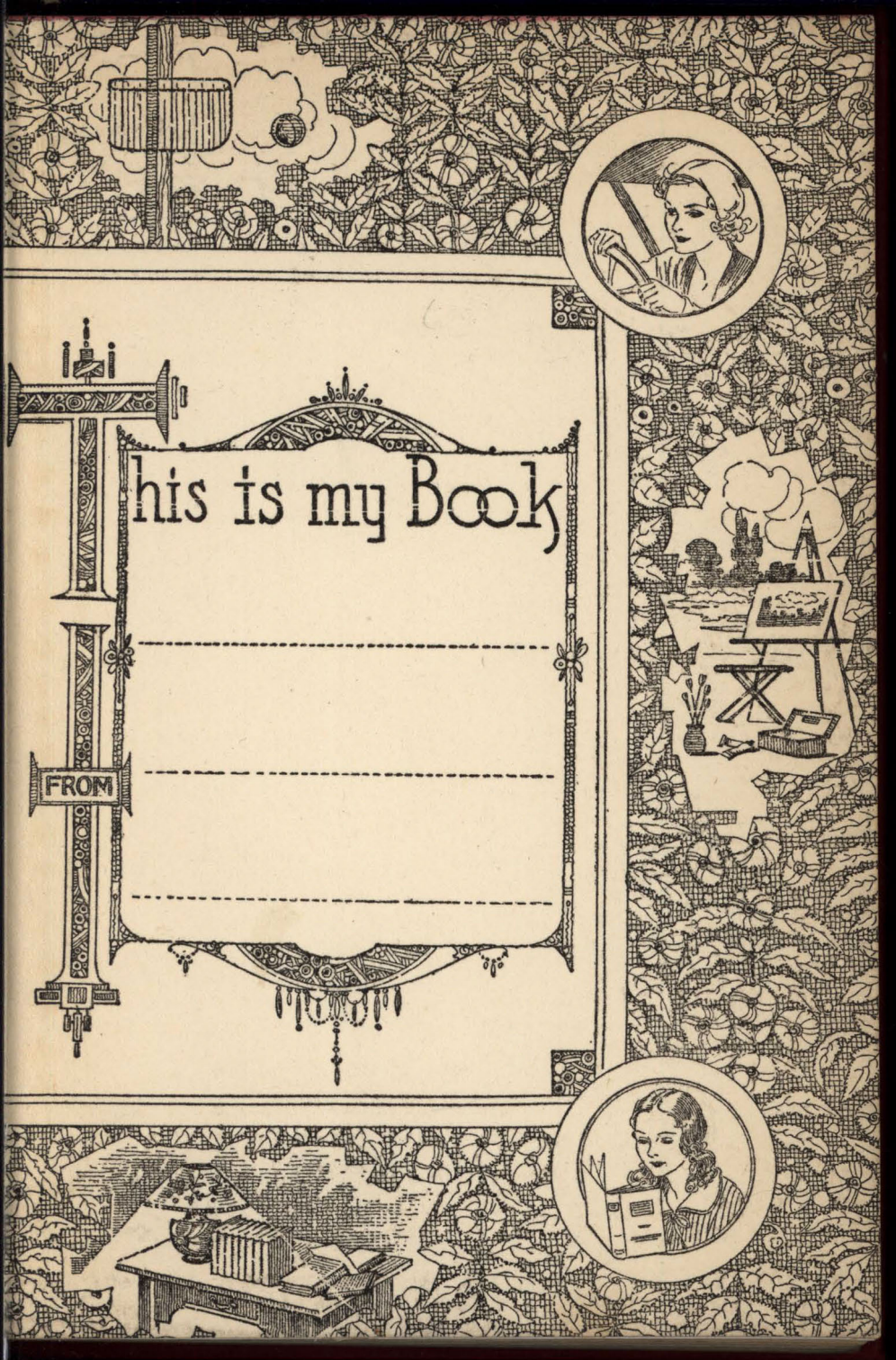
The SECRET PACT

MILDRED A. WIRT




This is my Book
FROM

SUDDENLY PENNY'S EYES FELL UPON THE UPPERMOST LINE OF THE FRONT PAGE.

"The Secret Pact"

(See page 53)

The Secret Pact

By

MILDRED A. WIRT

Author of

MILDRED A. WIRT MYSTERY STORIES
TRAILER STORIES FOR GIRLS

Illustrated

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PENNY PARKER

MYSTERY STORIES

Large 12 mo. *Cloth* *Illustrated*

TALE OF THE WITCH DOLL

THE VANISHING HOUSEBOAT

DANGER AT THE DRAWBRIDGE

BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

CLUE OF THE SILKEN LADDER

THE SECRET PACT

Other Titles in Preparation

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The Secret Pact

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CHAPTER

1

ABOARD THE GOODTIME

A BLANKET of fog, thick and damp, swirled about the decks of the excursion steamer, *Goodtime*, cautiously plying its course down the river. At intervals, above the steady throb of the ship's engines, a fog horn sounded its mournful warning to small craft.

"I hope we don't collide with another boat before we make the dock," remarked Louise Sidell who stood at the railing with her chum, Penelope Parker.

"That would be a perfect ending for an imperfect day," returned Penny, fitting her coat collar more snugly about her throat.

"An imperfect day! I call it a miserable one. Rain and fog! Rain and fog! It's made my hair as straight as the shortest distance between two points."

"Mine's as kinky as wool." Impatiently Penny brushed a ringlet of golden hair from her eyes. "Well, shall we go inside again?"

"No, I'd rather freeze than be a wallflower," the

dark-eyed girl responded gloomily. "We haven't been asked to dance once this evening."

"That's because we came without our own crowd, Lou. Except for that couple yonder, we're practically the only persons aboard unattached to a group."

Penny jerked her head in the direction of a young man and girl who slowly paced the deck. Earlier in the evening their peculiar actions had attracted her attention. They kept strictly to themselves, avoiding the salon, the dining room, and all contact with other excursionists.

"I wonder who they are?" mused Louise, turning to stare. "The girl wears a veil as if she were afraid someone might recognize her."

"Yes, I noticed that, and whenever anyone goes near her, she lowers her head. I wish we could see her face."

"Let's wander over that way," proposed Louise.

Arm in arm, they sauntered toward the couple. The young man saw them coming. He touched his companion's arm and, turning their backs, they walked away.

"They did that to avoid meeting us!" Louise declared in an excited undertone. "Now why, I wonder?"

The couple had reached the end of the deck. As the young woman turned to glance over her shoulder,

a sudden gust of wind caught her hat. Before she could save it, the head-gear was swept dangerously close to the railing.

Not giving the young man an opportunity to act, Penny darted forward. Rescuing the hat, she carried it to the couple.

"Thank you," the girl mumbled, keeping her head lowered. "Thank you very much."

Quickly she jammed the felt hat on her head and replaced the veil, but not before Penny had seen her face clearly. The young woman was unusually pretty with large brown eyes and a long, smoothly brushed black bob.

"This is certainly a miserable night," Penny remarked, hoping to start a conversation.

"Sure is," replied the young man with discouraging brevity.

He tipped his hat and steered his companion away from the girl.

Ruefully Penny returned to Louise who had been an interested spectator.

"Did you get a good look at the pair?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, but I've never seen either of them before."

"They wouldn't talk?"

"No, and the girl lowered her veil as soon as she could."

"Perhaps she's a movie actress traveling in disguise."

"Aboard a river excursion boat? I'm afraid not, Lou."

"Then maybe she's a criminal trying to elude the police."

"I fear the mystery of her identity must remain forever unsolved," chuckled Penny. "We'll dock in another five minutes."

Through the fog could be seen a dim glow of lights along the Riverview wharf. The *Goodtime*, its whistle tooting repeated signals, was proceeding more slowly than ever. Sailors stood ready to make the vessel fast to the dock posts when she touched.

Passengers began to pour from the salon, and Penny and Louise joined the throng. Many persons pushed and jostled each other, trying to obtain a position close to the gangplank.

Suddenly a girl who stood not far from Penny gave an alarmed cry.

"My pocketbook! It's gone!"

Those near her expressed polite concern and assisted in searching the deck. The missing purse was not found. Before the captain could be notified, the gangplank was lowered, and the passengers began to disembark from the steamer.

The girl, whose pocketbook had been lost, remained

by the railing, quite forgotten. Tears streamed down her cheeks.

"Excuse me," said Penny, addressing her, "is there anything I can do to help?"

Disconsolately, the girl shook her head. She made a most unattractive picture, for her blouse was wrinkled and her skirt was spotted with an ugly coffee stain. Beneath a brown, misshapen roll-brim hat hung a tangle of brown hair.

"Someone stole my pocketbook," she said listlessly. "I had twelve dollars in it, too."

"You're sure you didn't leave it anywhere?" Louise inquired.

"No, I had it in my hand only a minute ago. I think someone lifted it in the crowd."

"A pickpocket, no doubt," Penny agreed. "I've been told they frequent these river boats."

"Nearly everyone has left the steamer now, so I suppose it would do no good to notify the captain," commented Louise.

She and Penny started to turn away, then paused as they noticed that the girl remained in the same dejected posture.

"You have friends meeting you at the boat?" Penny inquired kindly.

"I haven't any friends—not in Riverview."

"None?" Penny asked in surprise. "Don't you live here?"

"No," answered the girl. "I've been working as a waitress at Flintville, up-river. The job played out last week. Today I took this boat, thinking I might find work in Riverview. Now I've lost my purse and I don't know what to do or where to go."

"Haven't you any money?" inquired Penny.

"Not a cent. I—I guess I'll have to sleep in the park tonight."

"No, you won't," declared Penny. Impulsively, she opened her own purse and, removing a five dollar bill, thrust it into the girl's hand. "This isn't much, but it may tide you over until you can find work."

"Oh, you're kind to help me. I'll pay you back just as soon as I get a job."

"Don't worry about that," replied Penny. "However, I should like to know your name."

"Tillie Fellows."

"Mine is Penelope Parker and my friend is Louise Sidell. Well, good luck in finding that job."

Edging away from Tillie who would have detained them indefinitely, the girls crossed the gangplank to shore.

"You were generous to give a stranger five dollars, Penny," commented Louise when they were beyond hearing.

"Oh, she needed it."

"Your allowance money, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but I couldn't allow the girl to go hungry or sleep in the park."

"No, I suppose not," replied Louise.

Penny paused, scanning the crowd on the dock. Her father, Anthony Parker, had promised to meet the excursion boat, but there was no sign of him or his car.

"Dad must have been detained at the newspaper office," she remarked. "I suppose we must wait here until he comes."

Removing themselves from the stream of traffic, the girls walked a short distance along the dock, halting beside a warehouse. The throng rapidly dispersed, and still Mr. Parker did not arrive.

"I hope we haven't missed him," Penny remarked anxiously. "In this fog one can't see many yards."

They had waited only a few minutes longer when Louise suddenly touched her chum's arm.

"Penny, there she is! Alone, too!"

"Who, Louise?"

"Why, that girl whose hat you recovered on the *Goodtime*. See her coming this way?"

Penny turned to stare at the young woman who was walking hurriedly along the dock. At first glance she was inclined to agree with Louise that it was the same girl, then she was uncertain. The one who approached

wore an expensive fur and carried a distinctive beaded bag.

"I don't believe I ever saw her before," she commented.

"I guess I was mistaken," admitted Louise. "She's too well dressed."

Apparently the girl did not observe Penny and her chum, for she passed them without a glance. Hurriedly she walked a short distance down the wharf. Then, with a deft movement, she took a package from beneath her smart-fitting coat, and tossed it into the water.

Turning, she retraced her steps to the gangplank of the *Goodtime*. A moment later the girls saw her meet a young man in topcoat and derby who had emerged from the crowd on the dock. Entering a gray sedan, they drove away.

"I wonder what she threw into the river?" mused Penny. "Didn't you think she acted as if she were afraid someone would see her, Lou?"

"Yes, I did. Whatever it was, it's gone to the bottom of the river."

Curiously the girls walked to the edge of the dock. Penny glanced over the side and gave an excited cry. Instead of falling into the water, the package had caught fast on a jagged dock post.

"It's hanging by the string!" she exclaimed.

Eagerly Louise peered down. "You're right!" she agreed. "But we can't get it."

"I'm going to try."

"Please don't," pleaded Louise. "It's too far down. You'll tumble into the water."

"Not if you sit on my heels."

Undisturbed by what anyone who saw her might think, Penny stretched flat on the dock. With Louise holding to her, she jack-knifed over the edge, clutching at the bundle which dangled an inch above the water.

"Got it!" she chuckled. "Haul away, Lou."

Louise pulled her friend to safety. Eagerly they examined the package which was wrapped in ordinary newspaper.

"I'll venture it contains nothing more than the remains of a lunch," declared Louise. "This is going to be a good joke on you, Penny."

"A joke?" quavered Penny.

Her gaze had focused upon a hole in the paper. Through the opening protruded a long strand of dark hair.

Louise saw it at the same instant and uttered a choked, horrified scream.

"Human hair—" she gasped. "Oh, Penny! Turn it over to the police!"

"It can't be that," said Penny in a calmer voice.

With trembling fingers she untied the string. The paper fell away and several objects dropped at Penny's feet. Stooping, she picked up a girl's long black wig. In addition, there was a dark veil, a crushed felt hat, and a cheap cloth jacket.

"A disguise!" exclaimed Louise.

"Yes, the girl who tossed this bundle into the river was the same one we saw aboard the steamer! But why did she wear these things and then try to get rid of them?"

"Why, Penny, don't you understand?" Louise demanded impressively. "She was a crook just as I thought. And she must have been the one who robbed Tillie Fellows!"

CHAPTER

2

THE RIVER'S VICTIM

PENNY STARED at the curious array of objects found in the discarded bundle. Unquestionably, they had been worn by the mysterious young woman observed aboard the *Goodtime*. However, she was not certain she agreed with Louise that the girl or her escort had robbed Tillie Fellows.

"I never heard of a professional pickpocket bothering with a disguise," she said doubtfully.

"Why else would the girl wear one?"

"I haven't an idea," admitted Penny. "Everything about it is queer. For instance, what became of her escort after the steamer docked? And who was that other young man in the gray car?"

"He appeared to be fairly well-to-do."

"Yes, he did. For that matter, the girl was elegantly dressed."

Louise kicked at the bundle with her foot. "What shall we do with these things? Toss them away?"

"Indeed, not!" Penny carefully rewrapped the wig, jacket, and other articles in the crumpled newspaper. "I shall take them home with me. One never knows what may develop."

Before Louise could inquire the meaning of her chum's remark, a taxi drew up nearby. The door swung open and out leaped a lean young man in a well-tailored blue suit and snap-brim hat.

"Why, it's Jerry Livingston!" exclaimed Penny, recognizing one of her father's reporters.

The young man saw the girls and came toward them. "Hello," he greeted cheerily. "Swell night for a murder."

"I hope you're not carrying concealed weapons," laughed Penny. "Where's Dad?"

"Delayed at the *Star* office. He sent me to meet the boat in his place. The fog made traffic slow. That's why I'm late."

Taking each of the girls by an elbow, he steered them to the waiting taxi.

"*Riverview Star*," he instructed the driver, and slammed the car door.

The fog was not so dense after the cab left the docks, but the entire river valley was blanketed, making it necessary for automobiles to proceed with headlights turned on.

"Have a nice time?" Jerry inquired as the cab crept along the waterfront streets.

"Not very," answered Penny, "but we ran into a little adventure."

"Trust you for that," chuckled the reporter. "City Editor Dewitt was telling the boys at the office that he'd bet you would come home dragging a mystery by its tail!"

"Here it is," Penny laughed, thrusting the newspaper bundle into his hands. "Lou and I did a little fishing from the dock and this is what we hooked."

While Jerry examined the contents of the strange package, the girls competed with each other in relating their experiences aboard the steamer. Although the reporter was deeply interested, he could offer no theory to explain why the young woman had discarded the bundle of clothing.

"Louise's guess seems as good as any," he commented. "The girl may have been the one who robbed Tillie Fellows."

"Pickpockets usually frequent crowds," said Penny. "During the entire trip both the girl and her escort kept strictly to themselves."

Jerry retied the bundle, tossing it into her lap.

"Your mystery is too much for me," he said lightly. "Afraid you'll have to solve it yourself."

Penny lapsed into meditative silence, yet oddly her thoughts centered upon nothing in particular. For a reason she never tried to explain, the waterfront seldom failed to cast its magical spell over her. She loved the medley of sounds, deep-throated blasts of coal boats mingling with the staccato toots of the tugboats, the rumble and clank of bridges being raised and lowered.

Always Penny had felt an intimate connection with the river, for her home overlooked the Big Bear. Not many miles away flowed the Kobalt, so closely associated with Mud-Cat Joe and the Vanishing Houseboat. It was the Kobalt which very nearly had claimed Jerry's life, yet had brought the *Star* one of its greatest news stories.

Ever since she was a little girl, Penny had loved newspaper work. Her entire life seemed bound up with printer's ink and all that it connoted. She had learned to write well and Mrs. Weems, who had served as the Parker housekeeper for many years, predicted that one day the girl would become a celebrated journalist.

The taxi came to a sudden halt and with a start Penny emerged from her reverie. Jerry leaned forward to ask the driver why they had stopped.

"I can't see the road very well," the man replied. "And there's a bridge ahead."

As the car crept forward again, Penny peered from the window. Through the swirling gray mist the indistinct lights which marked the arching steel bridge were faintly visible. A pillar gradually emerged, and beside it the shadowy, slouching figure of a man. His burning cigarette made a pin point of light as he tossed it into the river.

Suddenly Penny's blood ran cold, for a second man appeared on the bridge. Stealthily he approached the one who gazed with such absorption into the inky waters. His purpose was shockingly clear to those who watched.

Penny screamed a warning; the taxi driver halted his cab, shouting huskily. Their cries came too late. They saw the attacker leap upon his victim. There was a brief, intense struggle, then a body went hurtling from the bridge, fifty feet to the water below.

"You saw that?" cried Penny. "That man was pushed off the bridge! He'll drown!"

"We've got to save him," said Jerry.

As the cab came to a standstill, Jerry, the driver, and the two girls, sprang to the pavement. In the murky darkness the bridge appeared deserted, but they could hear the pounding footsteps of the attacker who sought to escape.

"Leave that guy to me!" exclaimed the cab driver. "I'll get him!"

Abandoning his taxi, he darted across the bridge in pursuit.

Jerry and the girls ran to the river bank. Below they could see a man struggling in the water and hear his choked cry for help.

Jerry kicked off his shoes.

"Wait!" commanded Penny. "You may not need to jump in after him. That boat will be there in a minute."

She indicated a tugboat which had passed beneath the bridge and was swerving toward the struggling man. As the young people anxiously watched, they saw it lay to while the captain fished the victim from the water with a boat-hook.

"Thank goodness, for that," murmured Penny. "I hope the poor fellow is all right."

"And I hope our driver catches the man who did the pushing," declared Louise feelingly. "I never witnessed a more vicious attack in my entire life!"

As she spoke, the cabman recrossed the bridge, scrambling down to the river bank.

"The fellow got away," he reported. "He had a car waiting."

"You didn't see the license number?" Jerry inquired.

"Not a chance."

"Too bad."

Penny was watching the tugboat which had been tied up only a short distance from the bridge.

"Jerry, let's go down there," she proposed. "I want to be certain that man is all right."

The reporter hesitated, then consented. Leaving Louise with the cab driver, he and Penny descended the steep, muddy slope.

The boat had been made fast to a piling. Face downward on the long leather seat of the pilot-house, lay the rescued man. Working over him was the captain, a short, stocky man with grease-smeared hands and clothing saturated with coal dust.

"Anything we can do?" called Jerry from shore.

"Don't know yet if he'll need a doctor," answered the tugboat captain, barely glancing up. "It was a nasty fall."

Jerry leaped on deck, leaving Penny behind, for the space was too wide to be easily spanned.

Inside the cabin Captain Dubbins was expertly applying artificial resuscitation, but he paused as the man on the seat showed signs of reviving.

"Struck the water flat on his back," he commented briefly. "Lucky I saw him fall or I never could have fished him out. Not on a night like this."

"The fellow didn't fall," corrected Jerry. "He was pushed."

Captain Dubbins glanced up, meeting the reporter's gaze steadily. He offered no comment for the man on the seat groaned and rolled over.

"Steady," said the captain. "Take it easy. You'll tumble off the seat if you don't stay quiet."

"My back," mumbled the man.

In the glare of the swinging electric light his face was ghastly white and contorted with pain. Jerry judged him to be perhaps thirty-two. He wore tight-fitting blue trousers and a coarse flannel shirt.

"My back," he moaned again, pressing his hand to it.

"You took a hard wrench when you hit the water," commented the captain. "Here, let's see."

He unbuttoned the shirt, and rolling the man over, started to strip it off.

"No!" snarled the other with surprising spirit. "Leave me alone! Get away!"

Jerry stepped forward to assist the captain. Ignoring the man's feeble struggles, they pulled off his shirt.

Immediately they understood why he had tried to prevent its removal. Across his bruised, battered back had been tattooed in blue and black, the repulsive figure of an octopus.

CHAPTER

3

THE OCTOPUS TATTOO

JERRY BENT closer to examine the strange tattoo. Between the two foremost arms of the octopus was sketched a single word: ALL.

"'All,'" he read aloud. "What does that signify?"

His question angered the man on the couch. Snatching the shirt from Captain Dubbins, he made a feeble, ineffectual effort to get his arms into it.

"I want out o' here," he muttered. "Quit starin', you two, and give me a hand!"

"Take it easy," advised the tugboat captain soothingly. "We was just tryin' to see if your back was badly hurt."

"Sorry," the man muttered. Relaxing, he leaned weakly against the leather cushions. "I ain't myself."

"You swallowed a little water," remarked the captain.

"A little?" growled the other. "Half the river went

down my gullet." As an afterthought he added: "Thanks for pullin' me out."

"You're welcome," responded the captain dryly. "Ex-sailor, aren't you?"

"Yeah. How did you know?"

"I can usually tell 'em. Out of work?"

"No." The man's curt answers made it clear that he resented questions.

"You haven't told us your name."

"John Munn," the man replied after a slight hesitation.

"We tried to catch the man who pushed you off the bridge," contributed Jerry. "He got away."

The sailor gazed steadily, almost defiantly at the reporter.

"No one pushed me off the bridge," he said. "I fell."

"You fell?" echoed Jerry. "Why, I thought I saw you and another man struggling—"

"You thought wrong," the sailor interrupted. "I was leaning over, lookin' into the water an' I lost my balance. That was how it happened."

"As you please, Mr. Munn," said Jerry with exaggerated politeness. "Oh, by the way, what's the significance of that octopus thing on your back?"

"Leave me alone, will you?" the sailor muttered. "Ain't a man got any right to privacy?"

"Better not bother him while he's feeling so low,"

said the tugboat captain significantly. "I'll get him into some dry clothes."

"Nothing I can do?"

"No, thanks, he'll be all right."

"Well, so long," Jerry said carelessly. With another curious glance directed at the sailor, he left the pilothouse, leaping from the deck to shore. Penny stood waiting.

"Jerry, what was the matter with that fellow?" she demanded in a whisper. "What did he have on his back? And why did he lie about being pushed off the bridge?"

"You heard us talking?"

"I couldn't help it. You were fairly shouting at each other for awhile."

"Mr. John Munn wasn't very grateful to the captain for being saved. He took offense when we tried to look at his back."

"I thought I heard you say something about an octopus. Was it a tattoo, Jerry?"

"Yes, and as strange a one as I've ever seen. The picture of an octopus. Between its forearms was the word: 'All.'"

"What could that mean?"

"I tried to learn, but Mr. John Munn wasn't in a talkative mood."

"It seems rather mysterious, doesn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know." Jerry took Penny's arm to aid her in making the steep climb. "Sailors have some funny ideas regarding self-decoration. This Munn was a peculiar fellow."

"It was odd that he would lie about being pushed off the bridge. Jerry, will you write it for the paper?"

"The story isn't worth more than a few lines, Penny. We can't say that Munn was pushed off the bridge."

"Why not? It's true."

"Munn would deny it, and then the *Star* would appear ridiculous."

"If I owned a paper, I certainly would use the story," declared Penny. "Why, it has wonderful possibilities."

"I fear your father never would agree. You talk him into printing the yarn and I'll be glad to write it."

"Oh, I suppose we must forget about it," Penny grumbled. "All the same, I'd like nothing better than to work on the story myself."

Reaching the pavement, they cleaned mud from their shoes before walking on to the waiting taxi. Louise immediately plied them with questions, displaying particular interest in the octopus tattoo.

"Do you suppose the man knew who pushed him off the bridge?" she inquired thoughtfully.

"I'll venture he did," replied Penny. "Probably that was the reason he wouldn't tell."

The taxi crossed the bridge and made slow progress away from the river. As the road gradually wound toward higher ground, the fog became lighter and the driver was able to make faster time. A clock chimed the hour of eleven.

"How about stopping somewhere for a bite to eat?" Jerry suddenly proposed.

"Won't Dad be waiting at the *Star* office?" Penny asked.

"He suggested that I keep you girls entertained until around eleven-thirty if I could."

"That being the case, we'll accept your invitation with alacrity," laughed Penny. "How about the Golden Pheasant?"

"Oh, no, you don't! Phillip's Bean Pot is nearer my speed."

A block farther down the street Jerry paid the driver and escorted the girls into a clean but low-priced restaurant.

"No item on the menu over ten cents," he chuckled. "Do your worst. I can take it."

Penny and Louise ordered sandwiches, while the reporter fortified himself with a plate of scrambled eggs, two doughnuts, and a cup of coffee. Returning to the front counter for a forgotten napkin, he nodded carelessly at an elderly man who sat alone, sipping a glass of orange juice.

The man acknowledged the greeting in an embarrassed way, quickly lowering his head. Within a few minutes he left the café.

"Jerry, who was he?" Penny inquired curiously. "I am sure I've seen him before, yet I can't remember where."

"That was old man Judson. Matthew Judson."

"Not the former publisher of the *Morning Press!*"

"Yes, the old man's been going to pieces fast since he closed his newspaper plant. Looks seedy, doesn't he?"

"His clothes were a bit shiny. I thought he seemed rather embarrassed because you spoke to him."

"Old Judson feels his come-down I guess. In the flush days he wouldn't be caught dead in a beanery."

"Is he really poor, Jerry?"

"Probably down to his last hundred thousand," the reporter grinned.

"What you say is conflicting," declared Penny impatiently. "First you imply that Mr. Judson is poor, and then that he's rich. I wish you would make up your mind."

"Frankly, I don't know. Judson owns a fine home on Drexell Boulevard which he's allowed to run down. I've been told he sold the *Morning Press* building several months ago. Some say he has plenty of cash salted away, others that he's broke."

"How did he lose so much of his money, Jerry?"

"No one seems to know for certain. According to rumor he plays the stock market heavily."

"It's strange he closed down the *Morning Press*," Penny remarked thoughtfully. "I always thought it was a profitable paper."

"So did everyone else. The *Press* had a large circulation. But one bright Monday morning Judson posted a notice, closed the plant, and threw over a thousand employes out of work."

"That was nearly a year ago, wasn't it, Jerry?"

"Thirteen months to be exact. Why this sudden interest in Judson?"

"Oh, I don't know," Penny replied vaguely. "His case seems rather pathetic. Then, too, he reminds me of someone I've seen recently. I wish I could recall—"

Jerry glanced at the wall clock, swallowing his coffee with a gulp.

"Time to move along," he announced. "We mustn't keep your father waiting, Penny."

They left the café and Jerry hailed a passing taxicab.

"It's only four blocks to the *Star* building," protested Penny. "Aren't you being too lavish with your money, Jerry?"

"Oh, I'll add this item to my expense account," he laughed. "Jump in."

The taxi turned left at Adams street, rolling slowly

through the downtown business section. Jerry peered from the car window at a large, four-story stone building which occupied a corner.

"That place sure looks like a morgue these days," he commented. "*The Morning Press.*"

Penny and Louise likewise twisted sideways to stare at the dark, deserted building. Windows were plastered with disfiguring posters and the white stone blocks, once so beautiful, were streaked with city grime.

When the *Press* closed, machinery, furniture and everything else was left exactly as it stood," remarked Jerry. "Too bad an enterprising newspaper man doesn't take over the place before it's a complete loss. The present owner doesn't even employ a watchman to protect the property."

"It does seem a shame—" Penny began, only to break off. "Why, that's funny!"

"What is?" inquired Jerry.

Penny had turned to glance back at the *Morning Press* plant.

"The building isn't deserted!" she exclaimed. "There's a light in one of the upstairs rooms!"

CHAPTER

4

A PROSPECTIVE TENANT

JERRY ROLLED down the window beside him and, thrusting his head through it, glanced back at the *Morning Press* building.

"Where do you see a light?" he demanded.

"It was on the third floor," declared Penny. "I can't see it myself now."

Jerry grinned as he settled back into his place between the two girls. "You certainly get a kick out of playing jokes," he accused.

"But it wasn't a joke, Jerry. Honestly, I saw a light. Didn't you, Louise?"

"Sorry, but I didn't. I'm afraid your imagination works overtime, Pet."

"I know what I saw," insisted Penny.

As Jerry and Louise smiled, she lapsed into injured silence. However, she was certain she had not been mistaken. Distinctly she had observed a light on the

third floor, a moving light which had been extinguished before her companions had noticed it.

The car presently drew up at the curb in front of the *Star* building. Anthony Parker, a newspaper tucked beneath his arm, stepped from the vestibule where he had been waiting. He was a tall, slender man, alert and courageous in following his convictions. Under his management the *Riverview Star* had grown to be one of the most influential papers in the state.

"Hope we haven't kept you waiting, Mr. Parker," Jerry greeted him, swinging open the cab door.

"Only a minute or two. Thanks, Jerry, for bringing the girls from the boat. May we offer you a ride home?"

"No, thanks, Chief. I'll walk from here. Good evening."

Jerry tipped his hat politely to Penny and Louise as the cab drove away. Mr. Parker asked the girls if they had enjoyed their trip aboard the *Goodtime*.

"The boat wasn't very well named, I'm afraid," answered Penny. "The trip proved to be rather terrible but we met some interesting people."

During the drive to the Sidell home, she and Louise talked as fast as they could, telling Mr. Parker about Tillie Fellows, the mysterious young woman who had dropped a bundle of clothing into the water, and particularly the man with the strange octopus tattoo.

"You'll have to tell the rest of it, Penny," laughed Louise as she bade her chum good-bye. "Thanks for bringing me home."

The cab rolled on, and Penny glanced questioningly at her father.

"What do you think of the tattoo story?" she asked hopefully. "Won't it make a dandy feature for the *Star?*"

"I regret to say it sounds like first-grade fiction."

"Why, Dad! Louise and Jerry will confirm everything I've said."

"Oh, I don't doubt your word, Penny. I am sure everything occurred as you report. Nevertheless, were we to use the story our readers might question its veracity."

"Don't crush me with such big words, Dad."

"Veracity means truth, Penny. Now your story is very interesting, but I think you may have placed your own interpretation upon certain facts."

"For instance?"

"Well, according to John Munn's statement, he fell from the bridge and was not pushed."

"But I saw it with my own two eyes, Dad."

"The night is foggy. You easily could have been mistaken. As for the octopus tattoo, what is so strange about it? Sailors compete in striving for startling decorative effects."

"Dad, you could rationalize the national debt," accused Penny. "Very well, since you scorn my story I'll give it to the High School paper!"

"An excellent idea. That is, if your editor favors highly colored journalism."

Penny made a grimace, knowing that her father was deliberately teasing her. It was a constant source of irritation that a boy named Fred Clousky had been elected editor of the Riverview High School Chatter instead of Penny by the margin of one vote. She disapproved of Fred, his pimples, and particularly the way he blue-penciled the occasional stories which she submitted.

"The Riverview High Chatter is just as silly as its name," she announced. "If I had that sheet I'd make it into a real paper."

"Sour grapes?" inquired her father softly.

"Maybe," grinned Penny. "But Fred is such an egg, even more conservative than you."

The cab drew up before the Parker home. A light still burned in the living room where Mrs. Weems, the housekeeper, sat reading a magazine.

"I am glad you have come, Penny," she remarked, switching on another light. "I was beginning to worry."

Since the death of Mrs. Parker many years before Mrs. Weems had taken complete charge of the house-

hold, caring for Penny and loving her as her own daughter. There were occasions when she found the impulsive girl difficult to restrain, but certainly never dull or uninteresting.

Mrs. Weems soon went to bed, leaving Penny and her father to explore the refrigerator. As they helped themselves to cold ham, potato salad, and celery, Penny spoke of the light which she had seen in the abandoned *Morning Press* building.

"It may have been a watchman making his usual rounds," commented her father.

"Jerry tells me the building has no watchman."

"Could it have been a reflection from a car headlight?"

"I don't think so, Dad."

"Well, I shouldn't lose sleep over it," remarked Mr. Parker lightly. "Better run along to bed now."

Penny arose at six-thirty the next morning, and before breakfast had written a two-page story about John Munn for the Riverview High School Chatter. She read it twice and was very well pleased with her work.

"Editor Fred is lucky to get this," she thought. "He should make it the lead story."

Off to school at a quarter to nine, Penny deposited her literary treasure in a box provided for journalistic contributions. All that day she went from class to

class, warmed by the knowledge that she had accomplished an excellent piece of writing. To Louise she confided that she thought the work might improve her grade in English Composition.

"I'm glad you've decided to contribute to the paper again," declared her chum. "It's time you and Fred buried the hatchet."

"Oh, I don't bear him any grudge," returned Penny. "Of course, everyone knows he campaigned for the editorship with free candy and soda pop."

At three-thirty, a minute before the closing bell rang, Fred Clousky sauntered down the aisle. With a flourish he dropped two pages of copy on Penny's desk, face upward. Across one of the pages in huge blue letters had been written: "Too imaginative for *Chatter*. Language too flowery. Spelling bad. Try us again sometime."

A red stain crept over Penny's cheeks. Her blue eyes began to snap.

"The poisonous little mushroom!" she muttered. "If he thinks he can do this to me—"

The closing bell rang, and immediately a group of sympathetic friends gathered about Penny. They all tried to soothe her feelings.

"Don't let it bother you," Louise advised her chum. "Of course, he did it just to make you peeved."

" 'Spelling bad,' " Penny read aloud. "Look at this

word he underlined! Anyone could tell I merely struck a wrong letter on my typewriter!"

Crumpling the page, she tossed it into the waste paper basket.

"'Too imaginative,'" she muttered. "'Language too flowery'!"

"Oh, forget it, Penny," laughed Louise, leading her toward the locker room. "Fred always has been jealous of you because you've had stories published in the *Star*. Don't let him know that you're annoyed."

"I guess I am acting silly," admitted Penny, relaxing. "What I must do is to give this problem a good, hard think. Editor Fred will hear from me yet!"

Declining an invitation to play tennis, she went directly home. For an hour she lay on the davenport, staring at the ceiling.

"Penny, are you ill?" inquired Mrs. Weems anxiously.

"No, I'm in conference with myself," answered Penny. "I am trying to arrive at a momentous decision."

Presently, she began to scribble figures on a sheet of paper. When her father came home at five o'clock he found her engaged in that occupation.

"Well, Penny," he remarked, hanging up his hat, "how did it go today? The editor of *Chatter* accepted your contribution I hope."

Penny grinned ruefully. "If you don't mind, let's discuss a less painful subject," she replied. "Suppose you tell me what you know about Matthew Judson and the *Morning Press*."

"Why this sudden display of interest?"

"Oh, I saw Mr. Judson last night at the Bean Pot. He looked rather depressed."

Mr. Parker sat down on the arm of the davenport. "It's too bad about Judson," he remarked. "I always admired him because he was a clever newspaper man."

"Clever? Didn't he mis-manage the paper so that it had to close?"

"Not that anyone ever learned. No, I never could figure out why Judson quit. The *Press* had a large circulation and plenty of advertisers."

"What became of the building?"

"It's still there."

"No, I mean who owns it," Penny explained. "Not Mr. Judson?"

"The building was taken over a few months ago by a man named George Veeley. Come to think of it, I once brought him home with me. You should remember him, Penny."

"I do. He was rather nice. I wonder what he plans to do with the *Press* building and its equipment."

"Hold it for speculation, I assume. In my opinion he'll have it empty for a long while."

"I rather doubt it," said Penny. "He has a prospective tenant now, only he doesn't know it."

"Indeed? Who?"

"You're looking at her."

"You!" Mr. Parker smiled broadly.

"I have it all planned," announced Penny with quiet finality. "What this town needs is a good, live newspaper, and an imaginative editor to run it."

"Oh, I see." With difficulty Mr. Parker kept his face composed. "And where do you propose to start your newspaper? In the old *Press* building?"

"You took the words out of my mouth, Dad. Everything is there, awaiting the touch of my magic wand."

"There's a little matter of rent. Several thousand a month."

"I have a solution for that problem."

"Your staff?"

"I'll gather it as I prosper."

"The necessary capital?"

"A mere detail," said Penny grandly. "I meet only one obstacle at a time. Tomorrow I shall accost Mr. Veeley with an attractive proposition. If he falls into my net, Riverview's newest paper, *The Weekly Times*, makes its bow to the public."

CHAPTER

5

COBWEBS AND RUST

"MY DEAR young lady, do I understand you correctly? You are asking for the use of the *Morning Press* building without the payment of rent."

Mr. Veeley, slightly bald and with a bulging waistline, regarded Penny across the polished mahogany desk. Upon arriving at his office that Saturday morning, he had found the girl awaiting him. For the past ten minutes she had stunned him with her remarkable figures and plans.

"Yes, that's about the size of it," Penny acknowledged. "What Riverview needs is a newspaper unhampered by the conservatism of over-aged minds. Now you have a fine building and equipment which is standing idle, fast falling into decay—"

"Decay?" Mr. Veeley inquired mildly.

"Expensive machinery soon rusts and becomes practically worthless unless kept in use," declared

Penny with authority. "If you'll agree to my proposition, I'll publish a weekly paper there, see that your property is kept in good condition, and turn the plant back to you whenever you can find a prosperous renter."

"Your father sent you here?"

"Oh, goodness, no! Dad thinks it's all a great joke. But it isn't! I *know* I can make a success of the paper if only I have a chance to test my ideas."

Mr. Veeley could not fail to be impressed by Penny's earnest, appealing manner. The novelty of her plan both amused and intrigued him.

"I wish I could help you start your paper," he said. "However, I doubt if you comprehend the cost of such a venture. Even should I permit the use of my building rent free, how would you meet such expenses as light, water and heat?"

"Oh, I have a plan for everything," insisted Penny grandly. "All I need is a building. I'll have the windows washed for you and do a good job of house cleaning. With me in charge you'll be able to dismiss your watchman."

"I haven't one."

"No watchman?" Penny inquired innocently. "Last night when I drove past the building I saw a light on the third floor. Evidently someone is prowling about there, Mr. Veeley."

"You're certain you saw a light?" the man inquired, disturbed by the information.

"Oh, yes, indeed. Excuse me for advising you, Mr. Veeley, but you really should have someone to guard your property."

Mr. Veeley smiled broadly. "You are a very convincing young lady. While I realize it is a foolish thing to do, I am tempted to let you have the key."

"Oh, Mr. Veeley, that's wonderful! You'll never regret it!"

"I'll allow you the use of the building for a month," resumed Mr. Veeley. "At the end of that time we'll discuss the future."

Penny was thrown into such a frenzy of excitement that she scarcely could remain outwardly serene until she had left the office. Once on the street she ran the entire distance to the *Star* building, dashing into her father's suite with all the sound effects of a laboring steam engine.

"Dad!" she cried dramatically. "I have it! The key to the *Morning Press* plant! Now I'm on my way to draw my savings from the bank."

"What's that?" demanded Mr. Parker. "Don't tell me Mr. Veeley listened to your crazy scheme!"

"He's heartily in favor of it, Dad. Now I must rush off to the bank."

"Come back here," her father commanded as she

started for the door. "I can't allow you to withdraw your savings."

"How can I launch the *Weekly Times* without capital?"

"You're really determined to try it?"

"Of course."

Mr. Parker reached for a cheque book. "How much will you need?"

"Oh, just sign your name at the bottom and leave the amount blank."

"Sorry, I prefer not to financially cripple myself for life. One hundred dollars is my limit. I'm throwing it down a sink-hole, but the lessons you'll learn may be worth the cost."

"I can do a lot with a hundred dollars," said Penny. "Thanks, Dad."

She picked up the cheque before the ink was dry and, dropping a kiss lightly on her father's cheek, was gone.

From the corner drugstore Penny telephoned Louise, telling her the news and asking her to come downtown at once. Fifteen minutes later her chum met her at the entrance to the *Morning Press* building.

"Just think, Lou!" she murmured, unlocking the front door. "This huge plant all mine! I'm a publisher at last!"

"You're completely insane if you ask me," retorted Louise. "This place is a dreadful mess. You'll never be able to clean it up, let alone get out an issue of the paper!"

The girls had passed through the vestibule to the lower floor room which once had served as the *Press'* circulation department. Behind the high service counter, desks and chairs remained untouched, covered by a thick layer of dust. Cobwebs hung from the ceiling light fixtures and festooned the walls.

Climbing the stairs, the girls glanced briefly into the newsroom, and then wandered on to the composing room. Penny's gaze roved over long rows of linotype machines and steel trucks which were used to hold page forms. There were bins of type, Cheltenham, Goudy, Century—more varieties than she had ever seen before.

Passing the stereotyping department, the girls entered the press room where slumbered ten giant double-decked rotary presses. Lying on the roller of one was a torn strip of newspaper, the last issue of the *Morning Press* ever printed.

"It gives one a queer feeling to see all this," said Louise. "Why do you suppose Judson closed the plant when it was prosperous?"

"No one seems to know the answer," Penny replied, stooping to peer into an empty ink pot. "But it

doesn't seem possible a man would give up his business, throw so many persons out of work, without a good reason."

"His bad luck seems to be yours," Louise remarked gloomily. "Well, since you've fallen heir to all this, what will you do with it? It will take a sizeable chunk of your hundred dollars just to get the place cleaned."

"Not according to my calculations," chuckled Penny. "Let's choose our offices and then we'll discuss business."

"Our offices?" echoed Louise. "I'm not in on this brain-storm of yours."

"Oh, yes, you are. You'll be the editor."

"But I thought you were that!"

"I'll be the managing editor," said Penny gently. "You'll have your office, and oodles of authority. Of course, you'll have to work hard keeping our staff in line."

"What staff?"

"We'll recruit from Riverview High, concentrating on the journalism majors. Now I think Jack Malone will be our new advertising manager."

"Jack Malone! Why, Penny, he hasn't an ounce of push."

"I know, Lou. But his father is president of the Malone Glass Company. I figure if his son is in charge of advertising—"

"I get the idea," interrupted Louise. "Penny, with a head like yours, we should land all the important accounts in town."

"I aim to win several fat ones away from the *Star*," Penny said with quiet confidence. "If we don't, it will be bankruptcy before the first issue of the paper is off the press."

Louise glanced dubiously at the dusty machinery.

"There's no denying you're a genius, Penny. Even so, I don't see how you expect to get these presses running."

"We'll only need one."

"True, but you can't recruit pressmen or linotype operators from Riverview High."

"Unfortunately, no," sighed Penny. "The first issue of the *Times* will be printed at the *Star* plant. Dad doesn't know it yet. After that—well, I'll think of something."

"How do you propose to get this place cleaned?"

"Every person who works on our paper must wield a broom, Lou. After we've chosen our offices, we'll scamper forth and gather our staff together."

Returning to the second floor, the girls inspected the offices adjoining the newsroom. Penny selected for hers the one which previously had been occupied by Matthew Judson. His name remained on the

frosted-glass door, and the walls bore etchings and paintings of considerable value.

In the top drawer of the flat-top desk there remained an assortment of pens, erasers, thumbtacks, and small articles. All letters and papers had been removed.

"Mr. Judson apparently left here in a great hurry," she remarked. "For some reason he never returned for the paintings and personal trifles."

Louise chose an office adjoining Penny's new quarters. They both were admiring the view from the window when her chum suddenly drew herself into an attitude of attention.

"What's wrong?" inquired Louise, mystified.

"I thought I heard someone moving about," whispered Penny. "Quiet!"

They remained motionless, listening. A board creaked.

Darting to the door, Penny flung it open. The newsroom was deserted, but she was almost certain she heard footsteps retreating swiftly down the hall.

"Lou, we're not alone in this building!"

"I thought I heard someone, too."

The girls ran through the newsroom to the hall, and down the stairway. Three steps from the bottom, Penny suddenly halted. On the service counter of the

advertising department lay a man's grimy felt hat.

"Look at that," she whispered. "Someone *was* upstairs!"

"He may still be here, too. Penny, did you leave the entrance door unlocked?"

"I guess so. I don't remember."

"A loiterer may have wandered into the building, and then left when we gave chase."

"Without his hat?"

"It probably was forgotten."

"Anyhow, I intend to look carefully about," declared Penny. "After all, I am responsible for this place now."

Both girls were uneasy as they wandered from room to room. Penny even ventured into the basement where a number of rats had taken refuge. The building seemed deserted.

"We're only wasting precious time," she said at last. "Whoever the intruder was, he's gone now."

Retracing their way to the advertising department, the girls stopped short, staring at the counter. The hat, observed there only a few minutes before, had vanished.

CHAPTER

6

HEADLINES AND HEADACHES

PENNY AND Louise stared at the counter, unable to believe their eyesight. They knew that they had not touched the hat. Obviously it had been removed by the man who had left it there.

"The hat's gone," whispered Louise nervously. "That means someone is still inside the building!"

"He could have slipped out the front door while we were in the basement."

Once more the girls made a complete tour of the building, entering every room. Unable to find an intruder they finally decided to give up the futile search.

"After this I'll take care to lock the door," declared Penny as they prepared to leave the building. "Now let's get busy and gather our staff."

During the next hour she and Louise motored from house to house, recruiting school friends. Early afternoon found the old *Press* building invaded by a crew

of willing and enthusiastic young workers. A group of fifteen boys and girls, armed with mops, window cloths and brooms, fell to work with such vigor that by nightfall the main portion of the building had emerged from its cocoon of grime.

Weary but well satisfied with her first day as a newspaper publisher, Penny went home and to bed. At breakfast the next morning she ate with such a preoccupied air that her father commented upon her sober countenance.

"I hope you haven't encountered knotty problems so soon in your journalistic venture," he remarked teasingly.

"None which you can't solve for me," said Penny. "I've decided to run the octopus tattoo story on the front page of our first issue."

"Indeed? And when does the first issue appear?"

"I'll print one week from today."

"A Sunday paper?"

"I thought probably your presses wouldn't be busy on that day."

"*My* presses!"

"Yes, I haven't hired my pressroom force yet. I plan to make up the paper, set the type and lock it in the page forms. Then I'll haul it over to your plant for stereotyping and the press run."

"And if I object?"

"You won't, will you, Dad? I'm such a pathetic little competitor."

"I'll run off the first edition for you," Mr. Parker promised. "But mind, only the first. How many papers will you want? About five hundred?"

"Oh, roughly, six thousand. That should take care of my street sales."

Mr. Parker's fork clattered against his plate. "Your street sales?" he repeated. "Where, may I ask, did you acquire your distribution organization?"

"Oh, I have plans," Penny chuckled. "Running a paper is really very simple."

"Young lady, you're riding for a heartbreaking fall," warned her father severely. "Six thousand copies! Why, you'll be lucky to dispose of three hundred!"

"Wait and see," said Penny confidently.

During the week which followed there were no idle moments for the staff of the newly organized *Weekly Times*. Leaving Louise in charge of the news output, Penny concentrated most of her attention on the problem of winning advertisers. Starting with a page taken by the Malone Glass Company, she and Jack Malone toured the city, selling a total of forty-two full columns.

The novelty of the enterprise intrigued many business men, while others took space because they were friends of Mr. Malone or Mr. Parker. Money con-

tinued to pour into the till of the *Weekly Times*.

Yet, when everything should have been sailing along smoothly, Louise complained that it was becoming difficult to keep her staff of writers satisfied. One by one they were falling away.

"We must expect that," declared Penny. "Always the weak drop by the wayside. If only we can get on a paying basis, we'll be able to offer small salaries. Then we'll have more workers than we can use."

"You certainly look to the future," laughed Louise. "Personally I have grave doubts we'll ever get the first issue set up."

Every moment which could be spared from school, Penny spent at the plant. Long after the other young people had left, she remained, trying to master the intricacies of the linotype machine. Although in theory it operated somewhat like a typewriter, she could not learn to set type accurately.

Friday night, alone in the building, the task suddenly overwhelmed her.

"Machines, machines, machines," she muttered. "The paper is going to be a mess and all because I can't run this hateful old thing!"

Dropping her head wearily on the keyboard, Penny wept with vexation.

Suddenly she stiffened. Unmistakably, footsteps

were coming softly down the hall toward the composing room.

Twice during the week Louise had declared that she believed someone prowled about the plant when it was deserted. Penny had been too busy to worry about the matter. But now, realizing that she was alone and without protection, her pulse began to hammer.

A shadow fell across the doorway.

"Who—who is there?" Penny called, her voice unsteady.

To her relief, a young man, his bashful grin reassuringly familiar, stepped into the cavernous room. Bill Carlyle was one of her father's best linotype operators.

"You nearly startled me out of my wits," she laughed shakily. "What brought you here, Bill?"

"I noticed the light burning," the operator replied, twisting his hat in his hands. "I thought I would drop in and see how you were getting along."

"Why, that's nice of you, Bill." Penny saw that he was gazing hard at her. She was afraid he could tell that she had been crying.

"The boys say you're doing right well." Bill moved nearer the linotype machine.

"Don't look at my work," pleaded Penny. "It's simply awful. I can't get the hang of this horrid old

machine. I wish I hadn't started a newspaper—I must have been crazy just as everyone says."

"You're tired, that's what's the trouble," said Bill soothingly. "Now there's nothing to running a linotype. Give me a piece of copy and I'll show you."

He slid into the vacant chair and his fingers began to move over the keyboard. As if by magic, type fell into place, and there were no mistakes.

"You do it marvelously," said Penny admiringly. "What's the trick?"

"About ten years practice. Shoot out your copy now and I'll set some of it for you."

"Bill, you're a darling! But dare you do it? What about the union?"

"This is just between you and me," he grinned. "You need a helping hand and I'm here to give it."

Until midnight Bill remained at his post, setting more type in three hours than Penny had done in three days.

"Your front page should look pretty good at any rate," he said as they left the building together. "Using rather old stories though, aren't you?"

"Old?"

"That one about the man who was pushed off the bridge."

"The story is still news," Penny said defensively. "No other paper has used it. Didn't you like it?"

"Sure, it was good," he responded.

Now that several days had elapsed since her experience at the river, even Penny's interest in John Munn and his strange tattoo, had faded. However, she was determined that the story should appear in the paper if for no other reason than to plague the editor of *Chatter*.

According to a report from Louise, Fred Clousky had called at the *Times* early that afternoon, and had seemed very gloomy as he inspected the plant. He had spent nearly a half hour in the composing room, a fact which Penny later was to recall with chagrin.

"Poor Fred," she thought. "After my paper comes out his *Chatter* will look more than ever like a sick cat."

Saturday was another day of toil, but by six o'clock, aided by the few faithful members of her staff, the last stick of type was set, the pages locked and transported to the *Star* ready for the Sunday morning run.

"I'll be here early tomorrow," Penny told the pressman. "Don't start the edition rolling until I arrive. I want to press the button myself."

At her urging, Mr. Parker, Jerry Livingston, Salt Sommers, and many members of the *Star's* staff, came to view the stereotyped plates waiting to be fitted on the press rollers.

"You've done well, Penny," praised her father. "I

confess I never thought you would get this far. Still figuring on a street sale of six thousand?"

"I've increased the number to seven," laughed Penny.

"And how do you plan to get the papers sold?"

"Oh, that's my secret, Dad. You may be surprised."

Exhausted but happy, Penny went home and to bed. She was up at six, and after a hastily eaten breakfast, arrived at the *Star* office in time to greet the workmen who were just coming on duty.

"Everything is set," the foreman told her presently. "You can start the press now."

Penny was so nervous that her hand trembled as she pressed the electric switch. There was a low, whining noise as the wheels began to turn, slowly at first, then faster and faster. Pressmen moved back and forth, oiling the machinery and tightening screws.

Penny's gaze was upon the long stream of paper feeding into the press. In a moment the neatly folded newspapers would slide out at the rate of eight hundred a minute. Only slightly over an hour and the run would be completed.

The first printed paper dropped from the press, and the foreman reached for it.

"Here you are," he said, offering it to Penny.

Almost reverently she accepted the paper. Even though there were only eight pages, each one rep-

resented hours of labor. She had turned out a professional job, and could rightly feel proud.

And then suddenly Penny's eyes fell upon the uppermost line of the front page. She gasped and leaned against the wall.

"I'm ruined!" she moaned. "Ruined! Someone has played a cruel joke on me!"

"Why, what's wrong?" inquired the press foreman, reaching for another paper.

"Look at this," wailed Penny. "Just look!"

She pointed to the name of the paper, printed in large black letters. It read: THE WEAKLY TIMES.

"I'll be the laughing stock of Riverview," Penny moaned. "The papers can't go out that way. Stop the press!"

CHAPTER

7

PETER FENESTRA

AS THE foreman turned off the rotary press, the loud throb of machinery died away and the flowing web of paper became motionless.

"How could the mistake have been made?" Penny murmured disconsolately. "I know that originally the name-plate was set up right."

"You should have taken page proofs and checked the mat," said the foreman.

"But I did! At least I took page proofs. I'll admit I was careless about the mats."

"Well, it looks as if someone played a joke on you," replied the foreman.

Penny's face hardened. "I can guess who did it! Fred Clousky! Louise told me he spent a long while in the composing room one afternoon while I was away. He must have changed the type just to make me look ridiculous."

"Well, it's done anyway," said the foreman with a shrug. "What will you do about the run?"

"I'll never let it go through this way. I'd rather die."

The foreman reminded Penny that with paid advertisements she would be compelled to print an issue. She knew that it would not be possible to make a change in the starter plate. The entire page must be recast.

"I don't suppose the type can be matched in this plant," she said gloomily.

"We may have some like it," replied the foreman. "I'll see."

Soon he returned to report that type was available and that the work could be done by the stereotypers. However, the men would expect overtime pay.

"I'll give them anything they want," said Penny recklessly. "Anything."

After a trying wait the new plate was made ready and locked on the cylinder. Once more the great press thundered. Again papers began to pour from the machine, every fiftieth one slightly out of line.

"What do you want done with 'em?" inquired the foreman.

"Have the papers carried to the mailing room and stacked by the door," she instructed. "I'll be around in the morning to arrange for deliveries."

Monday's first issue of the *Star* was hot off the press

when Penny stationed herself beside the veritable mountain of papers. The room was a bedlam, with newsboys shouting noisily for their wares. As they passed her on their way to the street, she waylaid them one by one.

"Here you are, boys," she said with an expansive smile. "Two dozen papers each. Sell them for a nickel and keep half of it for yourself. Turn in the money at the *Weekly Times* office."

"Two and a half cents!" exclaimed one of the boys. "Gee, that's more than we get for selling the *Star!*"

"Generosity is my motto," laughed Penny. "Just push those papers for all you're worth."

Leaving the *Star* plant, she went directly to the *Weekly Times* building. Permission had been granted to absent herself from school, and she planned to be busy throughout the day, checking on paper sales.

As Penny unlocked the front door, she noticed that a faint odor of tobacco lingered in the air. A perplexed frown knitted her brow.

"That's funny," she thought. "None of the boys are allowed to smoke here. I wonder if someone disobeyed rules, or if there's really a prowler in the building?"

Too busy to search the plant again, Penny gave the matter scant consideration. Tossing a package of lunch on the counter, she prepared for a hard day's work.

Now and then, to rest her mind from columns of

figures, she wandered to the window. Down the street, newsboys called their wares and it pleased her that they shouted the *Weekly Times* as frequently as they did the *Star*.

By ten o'clock the boys began to straggle in with their money. Only a few had failed to sell all of their papers, and not one neglected to make a report. Penny's final check-up disclosed that six thousand eight hundred and twenty-nine Weeklies had been sold.

"I can't expect to do that well after the novelty wears off," she thought. "But one thing is assured. My *Weekly* isn't going to be *weakly!*"

With a large sum of money in her possession, Penny decided to take no chance of losing it. After making a careful count, she poured the coins into a bag which she transported by car to the bank.

It was lunch-time when she returned to the plant. She went to the counter for the package of sandwiches. To her surprise it had disappeared.

"Now who took my food?" she muttered.

Penny was annoyed. She did not believe that one of the newsboys had picked up the package. Accumulative evidence pointed to a likelihood that someone was hiding in the building. The moving light, tobacco smoke, unexplained footsteps, suggested that a tramp might be using the empty plant as a comfortable shelter.

"But how can he get in?" she asked herself. "Doors and windows are kept locked."

As Penny considered whether or not to report the matter to police, the front door opened. A man of early middle age, well dressed, but with a sharp, weather-beaten face and a mis-shapen nose, entered.

"This the office of the *Weekly Times?*" he demanded grumpily.

"Yes," said Penny. "Is there anything—"

"I want to see the editor."

"You're looking at her now."

"You! A girl!"

Penny smiled and waited. The stranger hesitated and then took the *Weekly Times* from his overcoat pocket. With his forefinger he jabbed at a story on the front page—Penny's account of the tattooed man who had been pushed from the bridge.

"You know who wrote this?" he questioned.

"I did."

Again Penny's words surprised the man although he tried not to disclose it.

"That's a right interesting yarn," he said after a long pause.

"I'm glad you like it." Penny stared at the man with interest, wondering why he had come and what he wanted.

"I was kind of curious to know where you got your information."

"Why, I saw it happen, Mr—I don't believe you told me your name."

"Fenestra. Peter Fenestra."

"I was driving near the bridge at the time the man was pushed into the water," Penny resumed.

"You didn't see the one who did it?"

"Not clearly. May I ask why you are so interested in the story?"

"I thought maybe I knew that man, Munn. What became of him?"

"I can't tell you that. He was rescued by a tugboat captain. Everything I know about the affair is in the story."

"Well, thank you kindly," Mr. Fenestra said, tipping his hat.

Penny watched him leave the office and walk to his car. She had never seen the man before to her knowledge. Although she should have felt flattered by his visit, it left her with a vague, unexplainable sensation of distrust.

"There's something queer about the way he came here," she reflected. "Perhaps he knows more than he pretended."

Penny soon dismissed the matter from her mind,

turning her thoughts to the problem of the missing lunch. Resolutely she made a tour of the building, venturing everywhere save into the basement. As she had half expected, she found no one. However, returning once more to her work, she occasionally caught herself listening for footsteps.

At three-thirty Louise came from school with other members of the *Times* staff. She and Penny retired to the latter's private office there to discuss plans for the next week's paper.

"Lou," said Penny abruptly, "did you ever hear of a man named Peter Fenestra?"

"Why, yes, I have."

"He was here today to ask me about the octopus tattoo story. What can you tell me?"

"Not very much, Penny. He lives on a farm two miles from the south edge of Riverview. A place called The Willows."

"Oh, is he a farmer?" Penny was surprised. "I never would have guessed that."

"He isn't one. He merely lives there. According to the report, he has prospered by leaps and bounds."

"How does he make his money?"

"No one seems to know. When Fenestra came here a year or so ago he didn't appear to have anything. Lately he bought a fine car, and he spends money rather lavishly."

"He inquired about John Munn," Penny remarked. "Somehow I had a feeling that he was trying to pump information from me for a particular reason."

"Those who know Fenestra say he's a sly old fox."

"That's the way he impressed me, Lou. Perhaps I flatter myself, but I believe my tattoo story may cause quite a stir in Riverview."

"Was Fenestra annoyed by it?"

"I think so, Lou, although he tried to cover his feelings. He may or may not be a friend of John Munn, but he certainly was anxious to learn what became of him."

"You didn't ask him any questions?"

"No, his visit took me by surprise. But I've been thinking, Lou. I very much want a follow up story on John Munn for next week's paper. Suppose we run out to Fenestra's farm tomorrow."

"What purpose would there be in that?"

"Fenestra may be able to tell us interesting facts which will throw light on the mystery. He may understand the significance of the octopus tattoo."

"You're rather hopeful, I think."

"But you'll go with me?"

"Yes," promised Louise. "I've always had a curiosity to see The Willows. Besides, I need a vacation from my strenuous duties as editor."

CHAPTER

8

THE STORM CAVE

"WELL, PENNY," remarked Mr. Parker casually at the breakfast table. "I finally bought the cottage."

Penny closed her history book with a loud snap, favoring her father with complete attention. "You bought a cottage?" she echoed. "Where? When? Why?"

"I've talked about it for the past week, but you were so busy stealing the *Star's* advertisers that you never listened."

"I'm all ears now, Dad," Penny assured him, absently reaching for a piece of toast. "Tell me all about it."

"The cottage is located on the Big Bear River. Four rooms and a boathouse. Incidentally, I've hired a man to look after the place and keep the boat in shape. He calls himself Anchor Joe."

"Are we going to live at the cottage this summer?" Penny inquired.

"No, I merely bought it for week-end trips. I plan on a bit of fishing now and then. You may enjoy going with me."

"Oh, Dad," groaned Penny, "how can I? These days I don't even have time to wash my neck. Running a newspaper is more work than I figured."

"I'll give you the address of the cottage, at least," smiled Mr. Parker. "If you have any spare time during the next three months drive out and look over the place."

"I'll get there somehow," Penny promised, pocketing the card. Her hand encountered a typed, folded sheet of paper which she immediately placed in front of her father. "Oh, by the way, sign this for me, will you?"

"No more cheques."

"This is only an order for a ton-roll of paper. I'm trying to store up a few supplies so that eventually I can publish the *Weekly* in my own plant."

Mr. Parker signed the order, inquiring teasingly: "Have you engaged your pressman yet? Their wages come rather high you know."

"It takes everything the *Weekly* makes to meet its current bills," sighed Penny. "But one of these days I'll get the paper out in my own plant. Just wait and see!"

"I'll wait," chuckled Mr. Parker. "My hope is that

you don't fail in your studies before that happy day arrives."

On her way to school, Penny studied the card given her by her father, and noticed that the new cottage was situated not far from The Willows. Often she and Louise had talked of calling upon Peter Fenestra, but both had been kept busy at the *Times* office. Now that a linotype operator had been hired to set type, they had a little more free time.

"If Louise will accompany me, I'll visit both places tonight," decided Penny.

Four-thirty found the two girls walking through a dense maple and oak woods which rimmed the Big Bear River. A breeze stirred the tree leaves, but even so the day was hot and sultry.

"I wish it would rain," remarked Louise, trudging wearily beside her companion. "I never knew it to be so warm at this time of year."

"Maybe we can cool off by taking a boat ride when we get to the cottage," encouraged Penny. "I think I see the place through the trees."

Directly ahead, in a tiny clearing, stood a freshly painted white cottage. Quickening their steps, the girls soon arrived at the front door. No one seemed to be within call, so they pushed it open.

A long living room with a cobblestone fireplace met

their gaze. Beyond was the kitchen, a dining alcove, and two bedrooms.

As they went outside again, they saw a short, wiry man coming toward the cottage from the river.

"You're Miss Parker?" he asked, looking at Louise.

"No, *I* am," corrected Penny. "And you must be Anchor Joe." Her eyes fastened for an instant upon the tattoo of a four-masted sailing ship imprinted on his arm.

"That's me," agreed the man. "Go ahead an' look around all you like."

Penny and Louise wandered about the grounds, then returned to find Anchor Joe giving the motor boat, which was upturned on the grass, a coat of varnish.

"We thought you might take us for a ride," remarked Penny. "It must be cool on the water."

"I sure would like to, Miss Parker," said Anchor Joe regretfully. "But I dasn't get 'er wet now. Not until this varnish dries."

Penny nodded, and then asked: "You're a sailor, aren't you? Where have you sailed?"

"The Atlantic, the Great Lakes, the Gulf o' Mexico. Oh, I been everywhere."

Penny and Louise chatted with Anchor Joe for a time but, although they asked any number of questions, they gained very little definite information. The sailor

seemed unwilling to tell anything about himself, save in generalities.

"We may as well go on to Peter Fenestra's place," Penny presently remarked. "It's getting late."

Anchor Joe's varnish brush became motionless. He glanced up with sudden interest.

"I wouldn't go there if I was you gals," he said.

"Why not?" questioned Penny in astonishment.

"The weather don't look so good. She might blow up a gale before sundown."

"Oh, we're not afraid of a little wind or rain," answered Penny carelessly. "Come along, Lou."

Anchor Joe said nothing more, but his sober gaze followed the girls as they walked away.

Keeping close to the river, Penny and Louise trod a path which they knew would lead to the main road and Peter Fenestra's farm.

"Queer sort, wasn't he?" Penny remarked thoughtfully.

"Anchor Joe?"

"Yes, I wonder where Dad found him? He certainly didn't tell us much about himself."

Crossing the river by means of a swaying, suspension bridge, the girls came out from beneath the solid canopy of trees. Penny paused to stare up at the sky.

"Aren't those clouds odd?" she observed. "Just watch them boil!"

"They must be filled with wind," declared Louise uneasily. "Anchor Joe said he thought a storm would blow up."

"It's not far away either. Unless we step right along, we'll surely get caught in it."

"Perhaps we should forget The Willows and start home."

"We never could get there now," responded Penny. "If we hurry we may reach Fenestra's place before the storm breaks."

Walking even faster, the girls hastened along the winding path. The air remained sultry and very still. The sky, Penny noted, had changed to a peculiar yellowish color.

Then, as she watched with increasing alarm, a writhing, twisting, funnel-shaped arm reached down from the boiling clouds, anchoring them to earth. For a moment the entire mass seemed to settle and flatten out.

"Listen!" commanded Penny.

Plainly they both could hear a sullen, deep-throated roar as the storm moved forward.

"A tornado!" gasped Louise. "It's coming this way!"

"Run!" urged Penny, seizing her hand. "We still have a chance to make Fenestra's place."

In a clearing beyond a weed-grown field stood a white farmhouse, a red barn and a silo. One side of the

property was bounded by the willow-rimmed river, the other by the road.

Crawling beneath a barbed-wire fence, the girls cut across the field. The sky was darker now, the roar of the wind ominous. They could see the tail of the funnel whipping along the ground, veering to the south, then coming toward them again.

"We'll never make the house," Louise cried fearfully.

"Yes, we will," encouraged Penny.

She raised another wire strand for Louise to roll beneath. Her own sweater caught on the sharp barbs, tearing a large hole as she jerked free.

Dust had begun to blow. Trees and bushes bowed before the first gusts of wind.

Glancing frantically about for a place of refuge, Penny saw a low, circular cement hump rising from the ground not many yards distant. Instantly she recognized it as an old fashioned storm cellar.

"We'll get in there, Lou!" she shouted. "Come on!"

Running across the yard, they reached the cave. Entrance was guarded by a door built in the side of the cement dome. A brass padlock hung unsnapped in the hasp.

"Thank goodness, we can get in," gasped Louise. "Hurry!"

Penny tugged at the heavy door. It would not raise,

and then it gave so suddenly that she nearly tumbled backwards.

The door clattered back against the cement dome. Through the rectangular opening protruded the head and shoulders of Peter Fenestra. His face was convulsed with rage.

"What are you trying to do?" he demanded harshly. "Speak up!"

CHAPTER

9

A FALLEN TREE

"SPEAK UP!" Peter Fenestra commanded again as the girls stared at him in blank astonishment. "Why are you trying to get into my cave?"

"Listen to that wind!" cried Penny, recovering the power of speech. She pointed toward the sky.

"A tornado!" exclaimed Fenestra in a stunned voice.

"And it's coming this way," added Louise. "Let us down into the cave!"

Instead of stepping aside, the man came up the stone steps. Slamming the door of the cave, he padlocked it.

"Quick! Into the house!" he ordered.

"We'll be much safer underground," argued Penny. "That twister easily can lift a building from its foundation."

"Do as I say!" commanded Peter Fenestra harshly. "The cave is half filled with water. You can't go down there."

Deserting the girls, he ran toward the house. Mystified by the old man's actions, Penny and Louise followed, overtaking him as he reached the porch.

"Get inside!" he ordered.

The girls scurried through the door and he closed it behind them. Barely had they reached shelter when the wind struck the house in full force, fairly shaking it to its foundation. Windows rattled, a tree bough came crashing down on the porch, the air was filled with flying debris.

As a hard object shattered a pane of glass, Penny and Louise heard a terrified scream from the kitchen. A moment later a girl ran into the room. She stopped short as she saw Penny and Louise. They also stared, for it was Tillie Fellows.

"Stop that silly screeching!" Fenestra ordered sharply. "The center of the storm is passing to the south. Now get back to your work!"

"Yes, sir," Tillie mumbled.

Still gazing at Penny and Louise, she slowly retreated. However, as Peter Fenestra went to the window, turning his back, she made strange signs to the girls which they were unable to understand. Obviously she did not wish them to speak to her for she raised a finger to her lips, indicative of silence.

A gate was wrenched from its hinges and carried across the yard. From across the road came the crash

of an uprooted tree. With a stifled scream Tillie fled to the kitchen.

"That stupid girl drives me crazy," Fenestra muttered. "I don't know why I ever hired her."

"You can't blame her for being frightened," declared Louise quickly. "This is a dreadful storm."

"The worst is over now," said Fenestra. "You'll be able to go in a few minutes."

Penny and Louise glanced at each other. Peter Fenestra's remark made it very clear that he did not wish them to linger after the storm had passed. Without inviting them to sit down, he nervously went from window to window, watching the clouds.

Rain began to fall. At first it came in a heavy downpour, then slackened somewhat. The wind no longer tore at the doors.

"You'll be able to go any time now," said Fenestra. "I can let you have an umbrella."

"It's still rather bad," answered Penny. "If you don't mind, I believe we'll wait a few minutes longer."

The decision displeased the man. Frowning, he turned to gaze at the girls somewhat critically.

"Who sent you here?" he demanded. "Why did you come?"

His manner was so suspicious that Penny sensed it was no time to reveal the real purpose of the visit. Instead she said:

"My father has a cottage along the river. We were returning from there when the storm broke."

Her explanation seemed to satisfy the man. He shrugged and fell to pacing the floor restlessly.

The rain presently ceased. Penny and Louise felt that they no longer could delay their departure. Saying good-bye to Fenestra, they left the house.

Rounding a corner of the building, they were startled to hear a light tap on the window. Glancing up, they saw Tillie Fellow's face pressed against the pane.

"She's signaling for us to wait," observed Penny. "I guess she wants to talk with us."

The girls stepped into the doorway of a woodshed. In a moment Tillie slipped from the house, a coat thrown over her head.

"I hope old Fenestra doesn't see me," she greeted the girls nervously. "Let's get out of sight."

Penny and Louise followed her into the woodshed, closing the door.

"How long have you worked here?" the latter inquired curiously.

"Ever since I met you girls on the boat. I answered an advertisement the next morning and got this job."

"Do you like it?" asked Penny. "I imagine farm work is hard."

"The work is easy enough. But I hate the place! That's why I wanted to talk with you. Do you know

of anyone who needs a girl? I'll work for very small wages."

"I don't know of anyone at the moment," responded Penny.

"I can't stay here much longer," Tillie said, a note of desperation in her voice. "Mr. Fenestra is so overbearing and mean! He can't bear noise either. If I as much as rattle a dish he berates me."

"Does he pay you a decent wage?" inquired Louise.

"Ten dollars a week. I can't complain on that score. But there's something about him—I can't explain—it gives me the creeps."

"Fenestra is a peculiar type," admitted Penny. "He didn't act very friendly toward Louise and me. By the way, why does he keep the storm cellar padlocked?"

"That's something I wish you would tell *me*."

"He wouldn't allow us to enter it even when the storm was coming."

"Fenestra always keeps the cave padlocked," revealed Tillie. "He goes there every day, too. Sometimes he spends hours beneath ground. It rather frightens me."

"What do you think he does there?"

"I don't know. Once I asked him about the cave and he flew into a violent rage. He said if he ever caught me near it he would discharge me."

"He told us that the cave was half filled with water."

"I don't believe that," said Tillie. "He has something hidden down there."

"Haven't you any idea what it is?"

"No, and I don't care very much," returned Tillie. "All I want to do is get away from this place. If you hear of a job anywhere will you let me know?"

"Of course," promised Penny. "Mrs. Weems, our housekeeper, may know of a vacancy. If she does, I'll telephone."

"We haven't a telephone. Mr. Fenestra had it taken out because the ringing of the bell made him jumpy. He said the neighbors always listened to his conversations, too. He's very suspicious of everyone."

"Then I can run out in the car," said Penny. "I don't blame you for not liking this place. I shouldn't either."

"Thanks for everything," replied Tillie gratefully. "You've been awfully good to me. I must run back now or old Fenestra will ask me a million questions."

Hastily saying good-bye, she darted away. Walking slowly toward the road, Penny and Louise discussed Peter Fenestra's strange actions. They were inclined to agree with Tillie that he had hidden something of value beneath ground.

Across the road from the farmhouse a giant elm tree had been uprooted. They saw overturned chicken houses, fences laid flat, tangles of telephone and electric wires.

"Even more damage must have been done farther down the river," remarked Penny anxiously. "I hope our new cottage hasn't blown away."

"Shall we go there and see?"

"I wish we could."

For several hundred yards the girls followed the road, then once more they cut across the fields toward the winding river. As they approached the Parker property their misgivings increased. All along the water front, trees had been toppled and split. In sections there were wide paths cut as if by a scythe.

"The cottage is still there!" Penny cried as they presently ascended to higher ground. "I can see it."

"Several trees are down," observed Louise. "One has fallen across the porch."

"A beautiful birch, too," murmured Penny. "Anchor Joe will have a job clearing it away."

Approaching the cottage, the girls saw no glimpse of the workman. Penny called his name several times.

"I wonder where he went?" she murmured.

The girls rounded the corner of the cottage. As their eyes fell upon the giant birch which had demolished the porch railing, they were startled to see a slight movement among the leaves. A hand lay limp against the trunk.

"Anchor Joe!" gasped Penny in horror. "He's pinned beneath the tree!"

CHAPTER

10

A WORD TO THE WISE

PENNY AND Louise stooped beside the groaning man who lay pinned on his side beneath the tree. As they attempted to move him he writhed in pain and pleaded with them not to touch him.

"The tree will have to be lifted," declared Penny. "I'll go for help."

Leaving Louise to encourage Anchor Joe, she ran the entire distance to the main road. The nearest house was the one owned by Peter Fenestra. However, as she hastened in that direction, she observed a truck filled with telephone linemen coming toward her. Hailing the men, she told them what had occurred.

"I am afraid Anchor Joe is badly hurt," she added. "I'll telephone for a doctor while you go on to the cottage."

One of the linemen offered to make the call, leaving her free to guide the other four men to the Parker camp. Reaching the spot, the men raised the fallen

tree. Carefully they lifted Anchor Joe who had lapsed into unconsciousness.

"Bring him into the cottage," Penny directed, going ahead to open doors.

One of the rooms had been furnished as a bedroom with an old cot, a chest of drawers and odd pieces brought from the Parker home. Penny spread a blanket over the mattress and the injured man was stretched upon it.

"He's seriously hurt, isn't he?" she asked anxiously.

"Afraid he is," admitted one of the linemen. "Heat up some water and I'll do what I can until the doctor gets here."

Penny and Louise hastened to the kitchen to struggle with the wood-burning range. By the time they had the fire going well they heard voices in the yard. Glancing out the window they saw a lineman coming toward the cottage and walking beside a doctor who carried a light, black bag.

"It's Doctor Griswold," observed Louise. "He made a quick trip from town."

Penny ran to open the door for the two men. Then, at the doctor's bidding, she went to the kitchen again for the boiling water.

"You carry it in," urged Louise. "I can't bear to see poor Anchor Joe."

The linemen had left by the time Penny reentered

the bedroom. The doctor was working over Anchor Joe, and she observed in relief that he had recovered consciousness.

"Where do you feel pain?" the doctor inquired as he unfastened the man's shirt.

"My back and chest, doc," the sailor mumbled. "Feels like all my insides is crushed."

"Hardly that," said the doctor cheerfully, "or you wouldn't be telling me about it. Now let's see."

He took Anchor Joe's pulse, then gently probed his chest and sponged a break in the skin. Carefully he turned the man upon his back.

Penny drew in her breath, nearly dropping the pan of water. Across Anchor Joe's back was tattooed the sprawling figure of an octopus. She bent closer. Beneath the front arms of the repulsive sea creature appeared a single word: *One.*

"John Munn's tattoo was exactly the same, save for the word!" thought Penny. "It was 'All' while this is 'One.' What can be the significance?"

Even the doctor was startled by the strange tattoo for he glanced at it curiously as he probed.

"You are a sailor?" he inquired.

"That's right," muttered Anchor Joe. "Ouch, doc! Take it easy, will you?"

Penny could not remain silent. "Joe, do you know a man named John Munn?" she asked.

"Sure I know him," the sailor mumbled. "We shipped together on the *Dorasky*."

"Your tattoo is very similar to his."

Anchor Joe's pain-glazed eyes turned upon Penny as if he were seeing her for the first time. He made an effort to pull the blanket over his back.

"We had 'em put on together," he muttered. "Jack an' John, and that rat, Otto—"

"Please don't talk to the patient," said the doctor significantly. "He should be kept quiet."

"I'm sorry," apologized Penny.

She did not speak again until the doctor had completed his examination and had bandaged Anchor Joe's cuts and bruises.

"What do you advise, doctor?" she asked. "Will it be necessary to remove Joe to a hospital?"

"Neither advisable nor desirable for at least twenty-four hours," he replied. "I find no indication of internal injury, but it is best to be safe. The patient should be kept quiet, in bed, for at least a day or two."

"It's something of a problem to care for him here," said Penny frowning. "Do you suggest a nurse?"

"Any woman who has had practical experience in caring for the sick would do."

"Mrs. Weems may be willing to come," said Penny. "I'll telephone home at once and learn what arrangements can be made."

When the doctor left, Penny accompanied him as far as the first house. From there she telephoned her father, who promised to get Mrs. Weems and come at once to the cottage.

Louise was uneasily waiting by the time Penny returned. Outside the bedroom they held whispered consultation.

"Has Anchor Joe talked?" Penny questioned. "You know what I mean. Has he said anything about John Munn or the tattoo?"

"Not a word. But every so often he mutters that he'll get even with someone by the name of Otto—a fellow sailor who 'ratted.' "

"He mentioned Otto when I was in the room," nodded Penny. "I wish we dared question Joe, but the doctor advised against it."

"I don't think we should annoy him now. Perhaps later on he'll tell us about the tattoo and its meaning."

"Perhaps," echoed Penny. "However, if I am any judge of character, Anchor Joe isn't the talkative type. As soon as he gets over the shock of this accident, he'll lock those lips of his. We'll learn nothing."

"Why are you so convinced there's a deep mystery connected with the tattoo?"

"I can't explain it, Lou. I just *know* there is. I'll never rest until I learn the significance of those words, *All* and *One*."

Within a half hour Mrs. Weems and Mr. Parker arrived at the cottage, bringing a supply of linen, food, and comforts for the injured man. The housekeeper agreed to assume charge until Anchor Joe could be safely removed to a hospital.

When Mr. Parker drove to Riverview the girls accompanied him. During the ride Penny questioned her father regarding Anchor Joe.

"I know almost nothing about him," he replied. "He was sent to me by the Acme Employment Agency, and I didn't bother to ask for a recommendation."

"I've learned that he's a friend of John Munn," revealed Penny. "As soon as he's able to get about again, I mean to ask him a number of things."

Mr. Parker drove Louise to her home, and at Penny's request dropped her off at the *Weekly Times* office.

"By the way, what about dinner tonight?" he inquired. "Shall we dine at the Commodore Hotel?"

"Oh, Dad, I wish I could," Penny sighed wistfully. "Work is stacked a mile high on my desk. I'll just grab a sandwich somewhere and work late."

"I am afraid you are taking the newspaper business too seriously," replied her father. "Shall I leave the car for you?"

"It would be a help."

"All right, Penny."

Mr. Parker gave her the car keys, and walked on

to his own newspaper. Entering the *Times* building, Penny spoke to several high school boys who were working in the advertising office, and climbed the stairs to her own office.

For the next half hour she checked over galley proofs, marking corrections on the margins.

"I never imagined there could be so many things to do on a weekly," she sighed. "One never gets through."

A board creaked in the newsroom. Penny heard it and glanced up. A shadow passed slowly across the frosted glass of the office door.

"Come in," she called.

No one answered, and the shadow disappeared. Penny waited a moment, then impatiently arose and went to the door. The newsroom was deserted.

"Queer," she thought. "Someone walked past my office door."

Thinking that it might have been one of the high school boys, Penny went to the head of the stairs and called:

"Did anyone come up here a moment ago?"

"Not unless it was by way of the back entrance," was the reply.

Decidedly puzzled, Penny returned to her desk. As she sat down a sheet of paper lying on the blotter pad drew her attention. She was certain it had not been there a few minutes earlier.

Reaching for it, she gasped in astonishment. The paper bore a message scrawled in black ink and read:

"To the Editor of the *Weekly Times:*

You are hereby warned to give up your newspaper which offends public taste. We give you three days to wind up your business and close doors. A word to the wise is sufficient."

CHAPTER

11

MR. JUDSON'S DAUGHTER

PENNY READ the message three times. Obviously, it had been placed on her desk during the few minutes she had been absent. Yet she reasoned that it would be useless to search for the cowardly person who undoubtedly had slipped from the building.

"So I am warned to close shop!" she muttered angrily. "And the *Weekly Times* offends public taste!"

Penny crumpled the paper into a ball, hurling it toward the wire basket. Reconsidering her action, she recovered the note and, carefuly smoothing the wrinkles, placed it in her purse.

"I'll show this to Dad," she told herself. "But no one else."

When Penny's anger had cooled she was left with a vague sensation of misgiving. Resolutely she reflected that it was not unusual for editors to receive threatening notes. Often her father had shown her such communications sent to the *Star* by cranks.

"It doesn't mean a thing," she assured herself. "Not a thing. I'll keep on publishing the *Weekly* as long as I please."

One fact contributed to Penny's uneasiness. Often she worked late in the building, and a single light burning from an upper story window proclaimed to any street watcher that she was alone. In the future she must use far more caution.

Try as she would, Penny could not forget the warning. After the boys who comprised the advertising staff had gone home for dinner, she caught herself listening tensely to every unusual sound. At length she shut the desk and arose.

"I'm doing no good here," she thought in disgust. "I may as well go home."

Taking particular care to lock all doors and windows, Penny left the building. Street lights were blinking on as she climbed into the parked automobile.

Driving mechanically, she weaved through downtown traffic, now and then halting for a red light. As she was starting ahead from an intersection, an elderly man suddenly stepped from the curb. His gaze was upon the pavement, and he did not see the car.

Penny swerved the wheel and slammed on the foot brake. The edge of the fender brushed the man's overcoat. He gasped in astonishment and staggered backwards.

Penny brought the car to a standstill at the curb.

"You're not hurt?" she called anxiously.

"No—no," the man murmured in a bewildered way.

As he turned his face toward her, Penny recognized Matthew Judson, the former publisher of the *Morning Press*. Calling him by name, she invited him into the car.

"Let me take you home, or wherever you are going," she urged. "You don't look well, Mr. Judson. I am afraid I frightened you."

"It was my fault," admitted the old gentleman, staring at Penny. "I—I was thinking about something when I stepped from the curb."

"This is a dangerous intersection. Please, Mr. Judson, can't I take you home?"

"If you insist," he murmured, entering the car. "You seem to know my name, but I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"I'm Penny Parker. My father publishes the *Star*."

"Oh, yes." Mr. Judson's voice became spiritless.

"Your home is on Drexel Boulevard, I believe?" Penny inquired.

Matthew Judson nodded and in the same dull, lifeless voice supplied the address. He made no attempt at conversation.

As she stole occasional glimpses at the man, Penny thought that his face bore lines of mental fatigue and

discouragement. He stared straight ahead with glazed, unseeing eyes.

Hoping to start a conversation, she presently remarked that she was the managing editor of the *Weekly Times*. For the first time Matthew Judson displayed interest.

"Oh, are you the girl who has taken over my building?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Veeley allows me the use of it rent free. I hope you don't mind?"

"Mind?" repeated Mr. Judson, laughing mirthlessly. "Why should I?"

"Well, I thought—that is—" Penny began to stammer.

"You thought that because I gave up my own paper I might not wish to see the building used by another?"

"Something like that," admitted Penny.

"I try not to think about the past," said Mr. Judson quietly. "Long ago I made my decision, and now must abide by it. I realize that I never can publish the *Press* again. I'm broken, beaten!"

The old man spoke with such bitterness that Penny glanced quickly at him. There was an expression in his dark eyes which startled her.

"Surely one can't be defeated as long as he's willing to fight," she ventured. "Why, if you chose to make a come-back, I'm certain you would succeed."

Mr. Judson shook his head impatiently. "You don't understand. I am through—finished. All I can hope to do is to hold fast to what little I have, and try to protect Pauletta."

"Pauletta is your wife?" Penny inquired kindly.

"My daughter. If it weren't for her—" Mr. Judson hesitated, then finished in a voice quite casual: "If it weren't for her, I probably would end it all."

Penny was shocked.

"Why, Mr. Judson!" she protested. "You can't mean that!"

"Don't be alarmed," he said, smiling faintly. "I have no intention of taking the easy way out."

A dozen questions flashed through Penny's mind, but she was afraid to ask any of them. From Mr. Judson's remarks it was fairly evident that he never had relinquished the *Press* voluntarily. Could financial difficulties alone account for his state of mental depression?

In the darkening twilight the car approached a white-painted brick house, set back some distance from the boulevard. Once an elegant dwelling, peeling paint had made it an unsightly residence. Roof shingles were curling, the front porch sagged, while an iron fence only partially hid a wide expanse of untended lawn.

"This is my home," said Mr. Judson. "Turn into the driveway if you wish."

Penny stopped the car just inside the iron gate.

As Mr. Judson alighted, a girl who appeared to be in her early twenties, arose from a bench. A white collie at her side, she came toward the car. Midway across the lawn, she paused, staring. Then, she half turned as if to retreat.

"Pauletta," called Mr. Judson. "Will you come here, please?"

Reluctantly the girl approached the car, her gaze meeting Penny's almost defiantly. Pauletta was a beautiful girl with auburn hair and steel-blue eyes.

"Pauletta, this is Miss Parker," said her father.

"How do you do," responded the girl coldly.

The instant Penny heard the voice she knew where she previously had seen Mr. Judson's daughter—on the steamer *Goodtime!* Pauletta was the girl who had tossed a wig and clothing into the river.

"How do you do, Miss Judson," she responded. "Haven't we met before?"

Pauletta kept her face averted from her father. She met Penny's gaze with a bold stare.

"I think not," she said evenly. "No, Miss Parker, you are mistaken."

CHAPTER

12

OLD HORNEY

PENNY MADE no reply to Pauletta and the silence became unbearable.

"Won't you stay for a few minutes?" Mr. Judson invited. "Pauletta, why not show Miss Parker our rose garden?"

"It's rather dark," his daughter replied. "Anyway, she wouldn't care to see it."

"Indeed, I should," contradicted Penny. Deliberately she switched off the car ignition.

Pauletta glared at her, but dared make no protest in her father's presence. With a shrug she led Penny along a gravel path to the rear of the house. Mr. Judson remained behind.

As soon as they were beyond hearing, Penny said quietly:

"Need we pretend? I am sure you recall that we met aboard the *Goodtime*."

"Yes, I remember now," admitted Pauletta coldly. "You were with another girl."

"And you were accompanied by a young man."

"A friend of mine."

"This may be something of a shock," said Penny, "but my chum and I saw you drop a bundle containing a wig into the river."

"Oh!"

"The bundle caught fast and I fished it out."

"You have no proof it was mine! You—you won't tell Father?"

"Not if you can offer a good reason why I shouldn't."

"There are any number of them. You mustn't tell my father! That's why I pretended not to know you."

"I certainly wish you would explain. Tillie Fellows was robbed that night."

"Who is Tillie Fellows?"

"One of the excursionists. Her pocketbook was taken shortly before the boat docked."

"You can't believe I had anything to do with it!"

"I don't wish to think so, but your actions were very strange."

"I can explain everything," Pauletta said hurriedly. "My reason for wearing a disguise was a simple one. I didn't care to have anyone on the boat recognize me."

"Why, may I ask?"

Before Pauletta could answer, Mr. Judson came around the corner of the house.

"Please say nothing about it to Father," the young woman pleaded in a whisper. "I'll explain everything later."

Penny nodded, and for Mr. Judson's benefit, offered a few remarks about the roses.

"We once had a beautiful garden," commented Pauletta. "Now it's in ruin, the same as the yard. Father doesn't look after the place as he should."

"The grounds are large," replied Mr. Judson mildly.

"You shouldn't try to do the work yourself," Pauletta protested. "It was foolish of you to let the gardener go."

Penny felt increasingly ill at ease. As they wandered about the grounds, Pauletta kept making disparaging remarks, thoughtless comments which wounded her father. However, he offered no rebuttal, nor did he reprove his daughter.

"I really must be going," said Penny at last. "It's getting very dark."

Mr. Judson walked with her to the car, closing the gate after she had driven from the grounds. He stood there a moment, the wind rumpling his gray hair. Then he raised his hand in friendly salute and turned toward the house.

"Poor Mr. Judson," she thought. "So discouraged

and yet so gallant! How can Pauletta be completely blind to his suffering? Doesn't she realize?"

Penny did not regret having kept the young woman's secret, for she felt that the revelation of their meeting would only add to Mr. Judson's troubles. Pauletta represented his entire life, and if it developed that she had acted unbecomingly, the shock might be a severe one.

"I can't believe that Pauletta would steal," she told herself. "She must have had another reason for wearing the disguise."

Penny was satisfied that if Mr. Judson had not interrupted, the young woman would have explained her puzzling actions. Therefore, she was willing to give her the benefit of the doubt. She made up her mind that she would return as soon as she could to talk privately with Pauletta.

The Parker house was dark and deserted when Penny let herself in with a key. Her father had not expected her home so early and, disliking an empty house, had remained away. There was no telling where he had gone.

After preparing a belated dinner for herself, Penny spent an hour with her studies. However, her mind kept reverting to the events of the day. A great deal had happened. Her meeting with Peter Fenestra had been interesting. Anchor Joe's mishap worried her, and

she remained disturbed by the threatening message left on her desk.

"Could it have been written by a prowler in the building?" she mused. "Ever since we started the paper I've felt that someone was hiding there. It may be a scheme to get me away."

Before dropping off to sleep Penny made up her mind that the following night she would set a trap for the intruder. Taking Louise into her confidence, she made careful plans. Preparing a tasty lunch, the girls wrapped and laid it conspicuously on the counter of the downstairs advertising room.

"Now the stage is set," declared Penny. "Louise, you go upstairs to my office and tap on the typewriter. I'll hide here and see what happens."

After Louise had gone, Penny secreted herself in a storage closet not far from the counter. By leaving the door open she could see fairly well in the dark room for street lights cast a reflection through the plate glass windows.

The minutes stretched into a half hour. Louise's typewriting, at first very energetic, began to slacken in speed. Penny moved restlessly in the cramped quarters. She had not imagined that waiting could be so tedious.

An hour elapsed. Far down the street a clock struck ten times.

With a weary sigh Penny arose from the floor. Inactivity bored her, and she no longer could sit quietly and wait.

As she started from her hiding place, intending to call Louise, a door opened at the west end of the room. Instantly Penny froze against the wall, waiting.

A flashlight beam played across the floor, missing her by a scant two feet.

Penny, her heart beating at a furious rate, remained motionless. She could see the squat, shadowy figure of a man moving toward her. Boards squeaked beneath his weight.

Midway across the room, the man paused, evidently listening to the steady clatter of Louise's typewriter. Satisfied, he went to the window where he stood for several minutes watching street traffic.

As he turned again, the beam of his flashlight swept across the front counter, focusing upon the package of food. The man gave a low exclamation of pleasure. With the swiftness of a cat he darted to it and tore off the paper wrapping.

Penny waited until he was eating greedily. Then stealing along the wall, she groped for the electric light switch. As she pressed it, the room was brilliantly illuminated. At the same instant, the girl gave a shrill whistle, a signal to Louise that the culprit had been trapped.

The man at the counter whirled around, facing Penny with startled dismay. He was a gaunt, unshaven fellow in his late fifties with shaggy hair, and soiled, unpressed clothing.

Before he could retreat, Louise came down the stairway, blocking the exit.

"What are you doing here?" Penny questioned him. "Why did you steal my lunch?"

The man's lips moved nervously but no sound issued from them.

"Shall I call the police?" prodded Penny. She gave him a severe glance.

"No, don't do that," the man pleaded, finding his voice. "Don't call the police. I'll go. I won't bother you any more."

"Why have you been hiding in the building?"

"Because I have no other place to sleep, Miss. The cops chase you off the park benches."

Penny was surprised by the man's speech which belied his disreputable garments. His tone was well modulated, his manner respectful.

"You've been living in this building a long while?" she asked curiously.

"Maybe six months. I sleep down in the furnace room. I didn't do any harm."

"You're hungry, aren't you?" Penny inquired, less severely.

"Yes, I am, Miss. Lately I haven't been eating any too often."

"You may finish the lunch," said Penny. "And there's a thermos bottle of coffee under the counter."

"Thank you, Miss, thank you. I surely am obliged."

With a hand which trembled, the man poured himself a cup of the steaming beverage.

"You haven't told me your name," said Penny after a moment.

"Folks just call me Horney. Old Horney."

"What is your real name?"

"Mark Horning," the man answered reluctantly.

"I'm curious to learn how you've been getting in and out of the building."

"With a key." Old Horney devoured the last bite of sandwich, and poured himself a second cup of coffee.

"A skeleton key, you mean?" Penny asked in surprise.

"No, Miss. I have my own key. In the old days I used to work here."

"You're a former *Press* employee?"

"Sure, I know it's hard to believe," Old Horney replied, "but when a fellow's out of a job and money, it doesn't take long to go to seed. I lost my place when Judson closed down."

"And you've been unable to find other work?"

"In the past nine months I've worked exactly six

days. No one hires an old fellow any more. If I could have kept on with Judson three more years I'd have been due for my pension."

"What work did you do on the paper?" asked Penny with growing interest.

"I was a pressman."

Penny shot Louise a glance which was almost triumphant. Her voice when she spoke held an undertone of excitement.

"Horney," she said, "it's barely possible I may be able to find some sort of work for you later on. Do you mind writing your name on this paper?"

The old man took the sheet she handed him, without hesitation scrawling his name, *Mark Horning.*

Penny studied the writing a moment. To her relief it bore not the slightest resemblance to the warning message left on her desk the previous night.

"Horney," she questioned, "did you ever try to frighten me away from this building?"

"Oh, no, Miss," he replied. "Once I tiptoed up to your office. When I saw you were working there, I slipped down to the basement again."

"Did you ever place a note on my desk?"

"I never did."

Penny was satisfied that Horney had told the truth. Yet if he were not the culprit she was unable to guess who had warned her to abandon the plant.

"Horney, I've decided that we need a watchman around this place," she said abruptly. "If you want the job, it's yours."

"You're not turning me out?"

"No, you may stay. I can't promise much of a salary, but at least you'll have a place to sleep and enough food."

"You're mighty kind," Horney mumbled gratefully. "Mighty kind." He hesitated and then added: "I promise you won't be sorry you did it, Miss. Maybe you'll find I can be of some real use around this plant. I'm at your service and what's more, I'm for you one hundred per cent."

CHAPTER

13

PAPER PROBLEMS

THE NEXT afternoon Penny and Louise arrived at the *Weekly Times* to find that the entire lower floor had been cleaned and swept. Old Horney was discovered in the composing room, stirring up a great cloud of dust with a stub of a broom.

"I was just cleaning the place up a bit," he said apologetically. "Hope you don't mind."

"Mind?" laughed Penny. "I'm delighted. Our staff of janitors has lost interest here of late."

"I set a little type for you last night, too."

"Why, Horney! I didn't know you were a linotype operator."

"I'm not," answered the old man, "but I can learn most anything if I set my mind to it. If you have any jobs you want done just turn them over to me."

"Horney," said Penny soberly, "more than anything else I would like to publish the *Weekly* in my own

plant. The obstacles seem almost too great to overcome; do you think it could be accomplished?"

"Why, sure," said Horney. "If I had some tools and a little to do with I could get the presses ready in a day."

"What about the stereotyping work?"

"I could master the trick of it," declared Horney confidently.

"Horney, you're a jewel!" laughed Penny. "I'll place you in charge of my production department, but I fear I can't give you a salary in proportion to your duties."

"Don't worry about that, Miss. I would rather be working than sitting around with nothing to do."

"Then look over the plant and make up a list of the things you must have," suggested Penny. "I'll go over to the *Star* this minute and arrange for printing paper."

Leaving Louise in charge of the office, she jubilantly set forth for her father's plant. Now that Old Horney had been added to the staff of the *Weekly*, problems which previously had seemed unsurmountable suddenly had become easily solved.

Entering the *Star* building, Penny went directly to the stockroom, wandering about until she found Mr. Curry, the foreman.

"Here's something for you," she grinned, offering a slip of paper.

"What's this?" Mr. Curry asked with a puzzled frown. "An order for a roll of paper?"

"Yes, Mr. Curry," explained Penny. "At last I am going to publish my own sheet over in the old *Press* building. Dad is staking me to a little paper."

"A little! Why, one of these big rolls would print more copies of your paper than you could sell in six months! And paper is expensive. How about a half-roll or even a quarter? It would be a lot easier to handle."

"Oh, all right," agreed Penny. "Just so I get enough to print my first issue."

Mr. Curry led the way to one of the presses, pointing to a roll of paper mounted on a feeding rack.

"That one is about half used up," he said. "Will it do?"

"Yes, I guess so," agreed Penny. "May I have it right away?"

Mr. Curry replied by pushing a tram along a miniature railway which ran under the press. With surprising skill, he maneuvered the roll into position on the carrier. Then he pushed the tram to the elevator, moved the portable paper lift over the roll, and up it went to the platform. The elevator grounded at the first floor where the paper was rolled to the loading dock with pry bars.

"There you are," said the foreman.

"All I need now is a truck," Penny cried exultantly. "Thanks, Mr. Curry!"

Standing guard beside her paper she waited until one of the *Star* drivers had finished unloading his cargo and was ready to pull from the dock.

"How's chances fer a ride, buddy?" asked Penny, jerking her thumb in the manner of a hitch-hiker. "Me and my paper to the *Weekly Times*."

"Okay," laughed the trucker.

He rolled the paper onto the truck, and Penny climbed into the cab beside him. At the *Times* building she had the roll set off at the rear entrance where Old Horney easily could get it to the press room.

Highly elated, Penny mounted the steps two at a time, bursting in upon Louise who was busy writing headlines.

"Got it!" she announced. "About six hundred pounds of paper. That should keep the *Weekly* going for awhile."

"Here's something to dampen your enthusiasm." Louise thrust a letter toward her. "Another kick on that octopus tattoo story you wrote. A Mrs. Brown says she heartily disapproves of such outlandish tales, and that she'll never buy another copy of the *Times*."

"At least it proves my story attracted attention," chuckled Penny. "Anything else while I was gone?"

"Yes, Mrs. Weems telephoned to ask that you come

to the cottage as soon as possible. And that reminds me—the telephone bill. The company requires a month's advance—"

"Never mind the bills," interrupted Penny. "Did Mrs. Weems say anything about Anchor Joe?"

"He appears to be much better."

"I'm glad of that. I suppose I should drive out to the cottage before it gets dark."

"Run along. I'll look after everything here."

Penny swept her desk clear of papers and locked the drawers. "If you have any spare time you might see what you can do with my algebra assignment," she suggested. "I missed every problem but one yesterday."

"I have my own lesson troubles," responded Louise. "I'm wading up to my neck in Latin, and the next monthly quiz is certain to drown me."

"Teachers have no consideration," sighed Penny. "None at all."

Gathering up her school books, she bade Louise good-bye and left the office. On the stairway she met Old Horney.

"I've made my list," he said, offering it to her. "I figure we can't get out the paper with less than this."

Penny glanced at the paper and slipped it into her purse.

"I'll get the things somehow," she promised. "By

the way, there's a roll of paper on the loading dock."

"I've already hauled 'er in," replied Old Horney. "Any other jobs for me?"

"No, you seem to be one jump ahead," laughed Penny.

They descended the stairway together, the steps creaking beneath their weight. There was a different look to Old Horney, Penny thought, stealing a glance at him. His hair had been cut and his face was clean-shaven. Work had given him a new outlook, a desire to recover his self respect.

"I suppose you knew Matthew Judson rather well?" she remarked reflectively.

"Oh, sure."

"What was he like, Horney?"

"Well—" the old man hesitated, at a loss for words. "Judson was queer, sort of cold and unfriendly except to those who knew him best, but he was a square-shooter."

"The employes liked him?"

"Everyone did except a few chronic sore-heads."

"Horney, was it true that the *Press* was making money at the time it closed?"

"That's what everyone on the paper thought. It was a shock to us all when Judson closed down. I'll never forget the day he told us he was giving up the plant.

The old man looked like death had struck him, and he cried when he said good-bye to the boys."

"I wonder why he closed the plant?"

"Some say it was because he had lost a pile of money speculating on the stock market. But I never believed that. Judson wasn't the gambling type."

"Why do you think he gave up the paper, Horney?"

"I've done a lot of speculating on it," the old man admitted. "This is just my own idea, but I figure Judson may have been blackmailed."

"Blackmailed! By whom?"

"I can't tell you—it's only my guess."

"You have no evidence to support such a theory, Horney?"

"Nothing you could call that. But the day before Judson quit he was in the pressroom. He was sort of thinking out loud, I guess. Anyhow he said to me, 'Horney, the dirty blackmailer couldn't do this to me if it weren't for my daughter. If it didn't mean smearing her name, I'd fight!' "

"Did you ask him what he meant?"

"I made some reply, and then he closed up like a clam. I figure he hadn't realized what he was saying."

"You haven't any idea as to whom he meant?"

"I couldn't make a guess."

"No matter what the reason, it was a pity the *Press*

had to close," declared Penny. "I feel very sorry for Mr. Judson."

Bidding Horney good-bye, she hurried home for her automobile. However, as she drove toward the river cottage she kept thinking about what the old pressman had told her.

"It's barely possible his theory is right," she mused. "But why should Mr. Judson submit to blackmail even for his daughter's sake? Somehow the pieces of the puzzle refuse to fit."

CHAPTER

14

AN EMPTY BEDROOM

DARKNESS WAS inking the sky as Penny drew up at the end of the road. Parking her car between scraggly box-elders, she walked swiftly along the river trail, soon approaching within view of the Parker cottage.

The fallen tree had been sawed into cord wood, the yard cleaned of sticks and debris, and only the damaged porch remained to remind one of the severe storm.

As Penny opened the screen door, Mrs. Weems came from the kitchen.

"Joe is asleep," she warned in a whisper. "Perhaps we should talk outside."

Penny nodded and followed the housekeeper to the porch swing.

"How is he doing?" she inquired.

"Oh, much better," replied Mrs. Weems. "The doctor was here an hour ago. Joe is out of danger but must remain in bed for at least another day."

"I was afraid when you telephoned that something had gone wrong here."

"No," confessed the housekeeper, "I was merely lonesome for news. Is everything going well at home?"

"Oh, yes, we're getting along fine."

"I hope you remembered to bring in the milk. And you didn't neglect the dusting?"

Penny smiled ruefully.

"I might have known you would let everything go," sighed Mrs. Weems. "No doubt it's my duty to remain here, but I feel I should be at home."

"Anchor Joe needs you, Mrs. Weems. Has he talked very much?"

"Not a great deal. He ate a hearty lunch and seems in no pain."

"Did you see his back, Mrs. Weems?"

"Yes, the cut was an ugly one. The doctor changed the dressing while he was here."

"I mean the tattoo," said Penny impatiently. "Didn't you notice it?"

"I saw that he had one, if that's what you mean."

"You didn't question him about it?"

"Certainly not, Penny. Why should I?"

"Don't you read the *Weekly Times?* Anchor Joe's tattoo is a dead ringer for the one John Munn had on his back. Joe's already admitted that he knows Munn.

For all we know they may be bitter enemies. Perhaps it was Anchor Joe who pushed Munn off the bridge!"

"Penny, your ideas grow wilder each day," protested Mrs. Weems. "I hope you don't talk such nonsense to other people."

"All the same, Anchor Joe bears someone a grudge," insisted Penny. "He mentioned a person who had 'ratted.' Didn't you learn a single fact about him, Mrs. Weems?"

"His last name is Landa and he came to Riverview three weeks ago. He has no family."

"I think I'll question him myself when he awakens."

"No, I can't allow that," said Mrs. Weems sternly. "The doctor would never approve."

"I promise not to excite him."

"The answer is no! Now I wish you would help me by bringing in the washing. I must start supper."

Penny obediently took the basket and unpinned sheets and pillow cases from the line. She had just finished when she observed a tall, well-built young man with military stride, approaching through the trees. He tipped his hat politely.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I am trying to find the Parker cottage."

"Your search is at an end," answered Penny. "You've come to the right place."

"Do you have a man working here named Joe Landa?"

"Why, yes, we have."

"Where may I find him, please?"

"Joe is confined to his bed," explained Penny. "Unless it is very important I am afraid we can't allow you to talk with him today."

"It is important," said the stranger. "I am Clark Moyer, from the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

Penny's eyes opened wide. "A G-man?" she demanded.

"I am an investigator for the government," he replied, smiling.

"And you're after Anchor Joe?"

"I am here to question him."

"What has he done, Mr. Moyer?"

"I am not permitted to discuss a case to which I have been assigned," he returned, amused by her display of interest. "It's quite possible that Landa is not the man I seek. How long has he worked here?"

"Only a few days. He—he hasn't killed anyone, has he?"

"No," smiled the government man, "it's not that serious. The man I am after is short and wiry, sandy hair and blue eyes. He has a tattooed anchor on his right arm."

"And one on his back?" Penny asked eagerly.

"I wouldn't know about that. Does my description fit the man who has been working here?"

"Yes, it does! Almost exactly."

"Then I'd like to talk with him."

"Come into the cottage," invited Penny. "I'll call Mrs. Weems."

Summoned from the kitchen, the housekeeper listened to Mr. Moyer's request that he be permitted to see the injured man.

"If you are a government investigator I suppose it will be all right," she said reluctantly. "But the doctor's orders were that he was to be kept absolutely quiet."

"I'll only ask a question or two," promised Mr. Moyer.

"Is Joe wanted on a criminal charge?" the housekeeper asked.

"I was sent to check up on a man who calls himself Joe Landa. That's all I can tell you."

From the kitchen came the unmistakable odor of scorching potatoes. Mrs. Weems ran to jerk the pan from the stove.

"Penny, you see if Joe is awake yet," she called over her shoulder.

"I'll go with you," said Mr. Moyer quickly. "If I

have made a mistake it may not be necessary to disturb the man."

"This way," directed Penny.

She led the government man down the hall to the rear bedroom. The door was closed. She twisted the knob and pushed, at first easily, and then with increasing force.

"It seems to be stuck," she said. "The recent rains must have caused the wood to swell."

"Let me try," offered Mr. Moyer.

He took Penny's place, and after testing the door, gave it a hard upward push. There was a loud crash as it suddenly swung open.

"Goodness! What was that?" exclaimed Penny.

"A barricade. Keep back."

To Penny's astonishment the government man drew his revolver before entering the room. Disregarding the order to remain behind, she followed him inside.

"I might have expected this!" he muttered.

Penny's gaze swept the room. A chair lay overturned on the floor. The bed, still bearing the imprint of a man's body, was empty.

"Why, where's Joe?" murmured Penny. "His clothing is gone, too!"

Mr. Moyer strode to the open window.

"You think he left that way?" Penny questioned. "He must have heard us talking!"

The government man nodded as he stepped through the opening to the ground.

"He heard us all right. There's no question now that he's the man I am after! And I'll get him, too!"

Briefly examining the ground beneath the window, Mr. Moyer turned and walked swiftly toward the river.

CHAPTER

15

INFORMATION FROM TILLIE

PENNY LOST no time in telling Mrs. Weems that Anchor Joe had disappeared.

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed the housekeeper as she saw the deserted bedroom. "He was here a half hour ago. I know because I came in while he was sleeping."

"He must have heard Mr. Moyer inquiring about him," declared Penny. "Obviously he ran away to avoid the interview."

"Then that means he's guilty."

"I'm afraid so, Mrs. Weems. What do you suppose he did to have a government man after him?"

"He may have been a gangster."

"Anchor Joe?" asked Penny, smiling. "He hardly looked the type."

"In any event, we're fortunate to be rid of him."

"I wish we could have questioned him," Penny said

gloomily. "Now I may never learn about that octopus tattoo."

"You and your tattoo!" scoffed Mrs. Weems, beginning to strip linen from the bed. "Anchor Joe certainly deceived me. He seemed such a pleasant sort and I was sorry for him."

"I still am," said Penny. "The poor fellow is in no condition to be wandering around. I rather hope Mr. Moyer overtakes him soon. Then at least he'll get the medical attention he requires."

While Mrs. Weems straightened the bedroom, she wandered to the river's edge. Only a few stars were pricking the sky, and it was impossible to see very far. There was no sign either of Mr. Moyer or the man he pursued.

Penny returned to the cottage to eat supper with Mrs. Weems.

"Now that Anchor Joe has gone, I may as well go home tonight," declared the housekeeper. "I can't leave, though, until I've cleaned the cottage and set it to rights."

"How much longer will it take?"

"Oh, an hour or two."

"While I am waiting I may walk over to Peter Fenestra's place," Penny remarked. "I shouldn't mind seeing Tillie Fellows again."

"You'll be cautious in crossing the river?"

"Of course," laughed Penny. "I won't be gone long."

She washed the dishes for Mrs. Weems and then set forth for the Fenestra farmhouse. Frogs croaked as she crossed the swaying bridge, and far upstream she heard the faint chug of a motorboat. Otherwise, the night was unusually still.

Emerging from among the trees, Penny saw a light glowing in the distance. Knowing that it came from the Fenestra house, she used it as a beacon to guide her.

Passing the barn, she climbed a fence and entered the yard. The house was dark save for a single light burning in the kitchen. She could see Tillie Fellows moving about.

Penny knocked on the side door. Through the window she observed Tillie freeze into a tense attitude of fear. To reassure the girl she called her name in a loud voice.

Immediately Tillie ran to open the door.

"Oh, it's you!" she exclaimed in relief. "I was frightened."

To Penny's surprise Tillie wore a silk dress. Pocketbook, hat and gloves lay upon the kitchen table.

"I am afraid I've come at an awkward time," she apologized. "You were going somewhere?"

"I'm leaving here," Tillie answered grimly. She closed the door behind Penny.

"You mean for good? You've found another job?"

Tillie shook her head. "I've been discharged. He didn't give me a week's advance wages either."

"Oh, that's too bad," said Penny sympathetically. "But you'll find a better place. You said you didn't like it here anyway."

"I've hated it. Peter Fenestra is such a suspicious person. Why do you think he discharged me?"

"I can't guess, but I should like to know."

"He accused me of prying!"

"How unjust."

"Well, in a way, I was trying to learn about things I shouldn't," Tillie admitted honestly. "It was that storm cave."

"Did you get down into it?" Penny asked.

"No, but I tried. Old Peter was gone this afternoon and I decided to find out what he keeps hidden underground."

"The padlock wasn't locked?"

"Usually it is, but today he forgot. I got the door open. Just as I started down the steps he grabbed me by the shoulder. I was scared half to death."

"You mean Fenestra had hidden himself in the cave?" Penny questioned in astonishment.

"Yes, it was a trick to catch me prying. He said so himself, Penny. He only pretended to go away, then lay in wait."

"Did he threaten you?"

"No, he just told me to get out and never come back. It wouldn't surprise me if he leaves here himself soon."

"Why do you say that, Tillie?"

"Because he's afraid of his own shadow. But I don't blame him for being nervous. This house is being watched!"

As if fearing that unfriendly eyes were upon her at that very moment, Tillie went to the window and after peering into the yard, lowered the blind.

"Twice I've seen men hiding in the wheat field just back of this place," she confided. "The first time there was only one, but yesterday I saw three."

"Are you sure they were watching this house, Tillie?"

"Oh, yes, they were lying on the ground. For an hour they scarcely moved."

"Didn't you tell Fenestra?"

"I was afraid to do it, but I think he knew. All day he kept inside the house, and I saw him at the windows. He was as jumpy as a cat. Another thing—I saw him loading his revolver."

"He must fear for his life."

"I'm sure of it, Penny. Even if he's only going to the barn he carries the revolver with him."

A clock on the shelf above the stove struck eight times.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Tillie, "I must hurry or I'll never get away before Old Peter returns. Excuse me while I run upstairs for my suitcase."

"Where is Fenestra now?" Penny inquired before the girl could leave.

"In Riverview I suppose. He went away right after supper."

"Run along and get your suitcase," Penny advised. "I'll drive you into town."

"Oh, thanks," the girl answered gratefully. "It won't take me long."

After Tillie had gone, Penny walked to the window and rolled up the blind. Across the yard she could see the disfiguring mound of earth and cement. What secret did the storm cave guard? Why was it always kept padlocked?

Abruptly she went to the foot of the stairs and called:

"Oh, Tillie, I'm going outside for a minute. I'll come back."

"All right," agreed the girl. "Sorry to keep you waiting but I still have a few things to pick up."

Leaving by the side door, Penny paused on the

porch for a moment. Carefully she glanced about the yard and surrounding fields. A thin quarter moon rising over the pine trees gave dim shape to the barn and silo. She could see no one, yet Tillie's revelation that strange men spied upon the house, made her attentive to danger.

Swiftly she crossed the lawn to the storm cave. As she had fully expected, the slanting door was padlocked.

"Oh, shoot!" she exclaimed impatiently. "I want to get down there!"

She jerked at the padlock several times, and then accepting the situation, turned toward the house. As she walked, Penny's eyes fastened absently upon a clump of lilac bushes some twenty yards from the cave. They were moving gently as if stirred by a wind. Yet there was no wind.

Penny did not pause, but every sense became alert. Her heart pounded. Distinctly she could see a man crawling on hands and knees behind the lilacs.

CHAPTER

16

BEHIND THE LILACS

WITHOUT DISCLOSING by her actions that she had observed anything amiss, Penny walked steadily on toward the house. Her first thought had been that it was Peter Fenestra who spied upon her. However, as the figure straightened she knew she had been mistaken. The man was not Fenestra.

Before she could see his face, he moved to another clump of bushes, and then was enveloped by darkness.

Entering the house, Penny blew out the kerosene lamp and stood by the window, watching. She could not see the man. He had vanished completely.

"That proves that Tillie was correct," she thought. "This house *is* being watched. I wonder why."

As she waited, Tillie came down the stairway, carrying her luggage. Observing that the kitchen was dark, she paused in alarm.

"It's all right," Penny called reassuringly. "I blew the light out so that I wouldn't be seen from outside."

"Is anyone there?" Tillie demanded, coming quickly to the window. Her pallid features were rigid with fear and her breathing quickened.

"He's gone now, I think."

"There was someone a moment ago?"

"Yes, a man, hiding behind the lilacs. I believe he must have been watching the house—or possibly the storm cellar!"

"Then you see I was right," Tillie declared. "Oh, this is a dreadful place, and I'll be glad to leave it."

"I almost wish you were staying," said Penny slowly. "You might be able to learn what's hidden in that cave."

"Not with Peter Fenestra so suspicious. Anyway, you couldn't hire me to remain even if he would allow it. I'd rather starve."

"You have no place to go, Tillie?"

"I'll find work. If not in Riverview then I can return to the country. Anything will be better than what I've had."

Penny groped in the dark for the lamp, relighting it.

"Tillie," she said, "how would you like to work at our place for a few days?"

"You don't mean it."

"I do if it can be arranged," Penny affirmed. "We have a housekeeper, but it occurred to me that she might take your place here."

"She'd be very foolish to give up a good job for this."

"It would only be temporary. I think I can induce her to make the change for a few days. The question is, can we get Peter Fenestra to accept her?"

"I doubt if he'll hire anyone now that I am leaving. Why do you want your housekeeper in such a place as this, Penny?"

"Only for one reason. To learn what's going on here. I confess you've made me very curious about the storm cave."

"Fenestra would watch her every minute, the same as he did me. It won't work."

"It will if Mrs. Weems can get the job," declared Penny confidently. "First of all, we must make Fenestra so uncomfortable he'll want someone to take care of the house. Is he a good cook?"

"Oh, wretched. And the trick of keeping a wood fire going is simply beyond him. Why, if we turned the damper, it never would occur to him to change it."

"Thanks for the idea," laughed Penny. "Let's hide the breakfast supplies, too."

Tillie was quite certain that her friend did not know what she was doing, but she offered no objection to the plan. Before leaving the house they altered the stove damper, hid the coffee pot, and placed salt in the sugar bowl.

"If Old Peter doesn't get his coffee in the morning he'll simply rave," chuckled Tillie. "Missing it may be the one thing which will make him hire a new housekeeper."

The girls were watchful as they crossed the yard, but they observed no one lurking about the premises. Evidently the man who had hidden behind the lilacs had taken himself elsewhere.

Penny escorted Tillie to the parked automobile, leaving her there while she went to the cottage for Mrs. Weems. The housekeeper was ready and waiting by the time she arrived.

"Penny, I nearly gave you up," she sighed. "Why did it take so long?"

"I've been busy finding you a new position," chuckled Penny. "Starting tomorrow morning, you're to work for Peter Fenestra instead of us."

In the act of locking the cottage door, Mrs. Weems turned to face the girl.

"Penny," she said, "I am tired tonight and in no mood for your jokes."

"This isn't a joke, Mrs. Weems. I really do want you to change jobs with Tillie Fellows. You remember I told you about her."

Not giving the housekeeper an opportunity to speak, she rapidly outlined her plan.

"Early tomorrow morning I'll drive you to Fenes-

tra's farm," she ended gleefully. "You're to knock on the door, and say you're looking for a job at very low wages. Fenestra will be so desperate he'll welcome you with open arms. Then as soon as he's off his guard you learn what is hidden in the storm cave."

"How lovely," said Mrs. Weems. "I've listened to your crazy schemes for years, Penny, but this one takes the prize!"

"You'll do it, won't you?"

"I certainly will not." The housekeeper spoke with biting emphasis.

"Oh, Mrs. Weems," Penny moaned. "You don't realize how much this means to me! If only you'll go there, I may be able to get a wonderful scoop for the *Weekly Times*."

"I wish you never had started that paper. I declare, ever since you took over the old *Press* plant, you've done the wildest things."

"This isn't wild," Penny argued. "It's absolutely logical. I would try for the job myself only I know Fenestra wouldn't give it to me. Besides, I am kept busy at the plant."

"I refuse to play detective for you, Penny. That's final."

Completely downcast, Penny followed Mrs. Weems along the river trail. However, she had no intention of giving up so easily.

"Then if you won't," she remarked, "I must take Tillie to a charity home. She had intended to start working at our place."

"The girl may spend the night with us, if you like. We have an extra room."

"Tillie would never accept such a favor," insisted Penny. "More than anything else she wants a job. Mrs. Weems, please reconsider—"

"It's a crazy scheme!"

"No, it isn't," Penny refuted, and noting indications of weakening, launched into another lengthy argument.

Mrs. Weems drew a deep sigh. "I don't know why I allow you to twist me around your finger the way you do."

"You'll try for the job?"

"I suppose so. But what will your father say?"

"He'll call it clever journalism," chuckled Penny. "Don't you worry about Dad. Just leave everything to me."

During the ride to Riverview Mrs. Weems was further influenced by Tillie Fellows' account of Fenestra's peculiar actions. Gradually she began to share Penny's opinion that the man might have reason to fear for his life. However, she could not agree with the girls that anything of great value was hidden in the cave.

"Perhaps we're wrong," Penny conceded, "but you must go there with an open mind, Mrs. Weems. Observe everything you can and report to me. Particularly I want to learn what Fenestra knows about John Munn and the octopus tattoo."

"I shan't try very hard to get the job," threatened the housekeeper.

At seven the next morning Penny awakened Mrs. Weems from a sound slumber, reminding her that it was time to start for the Fenestra farm. Protesting that the idea seemed crazier than ever, the housekeeper snuggled down beneath the covers again.

"You promised you would go," reminded Penny brutally. "Please hurry, because I must get you established before I go to school."

By the time Mrs. Weems was dressed, breakfast and the car awaited her. She drank the bitterly strong coffee and, still protesting, allowed Penny to drive her within view of the Fenestra farm.

"Is that the place?" she inquired with distaste as the automobile halted.

"Yes, I don't dare go any closer for fear Fenestra will see me. You know the story you're to tell him."

"Which one? You've suggested so many that my mind is a-whirl."

"Then make it simple. Just say you're a widow, out of work, and that you're a wonderful housekeeper.

I'll wait here. If you go inside I'll know you've been given the job."

"When will you come for me?"

"I'll try to see you tomorrow. But hold the fort until I arrive even if it's a week."

A bundle of clothing under her arm, Mrs. Weems trudged on down the road. Penny watched her with misgiving. The adventure was not to the housekeeper's liking, and it was doubtful that her application for work would be an enthusiastic one.

Turning the car in the road, she pulled to one side and waited. Mrs. Weems had reached the farmhouse. Following instructions, she knocked at the side entrance. In a moment or two the door was opened by Peter Fenestra.

Anxiously, Penny watched. The interview seemed to be taking a long while, but at least Fenestra had not closed the door in the housekeeper's face.

Then, to her delight, Mrs. Weems followed the man into the house.

"The job is hers!" she thought exultantly. "If she doesn't fail me, I may yet break an important story in my paper! I feel in my bones that Peter Fenestra's cave soon will yield its secret!"

CHAPTER

17

THE ART OF TATTOO

AT SCHOOL, during the afternoon assembly period, Penny received a note from Louise which read:

"The *Weekly Times* is in urgent need of feature stories for our next issue. Any ideas?"

Penny scrawled a huge zero on the paper, decorated it with angel wings, and sent it down the aisle. An answer came immediately.

"You'll have to do something about it. All of our reporters are taking a vacation until after monthly exams. Can't you write some sort of story?"

Penny considered the problem as she studied her history lesson. Just as the dismissal bell rang an inspiration seized her.

"Lou, I do have an idea!" she declared, linking arms with her chum. "How about an interview with Ellis Saal?"

"Who is he?" inquired Louise, somewhat dubiously.

"A tattoo artist who has a little shop on Dorr Street. He takes passport pictures, too. I noticed the place weeks ago."

"What makes you think the story would be worth printing?"

"Tattooing is a fascinating subject."

"It is to you. I doubt if our readers share your enthusiasm."

"They will when they read my story," countered Penny.

Early the next morning she presented herself at Mr. Saal's place of business, a den-like crack in the wall, barely wide enough to accommodate a door.

Pausing, she stared at a sign which proclaimed that for a nominal sum Mr. Saal would tattoo or photograph all comers. In a glass frame were displayed many samples of tattooing—bleeding hearts, clasped hands, sailing ships, birds in flight and other artistic conceptions.

Penny entered the shop. The front end of the long, narrow room was unoccupied, but the sound of hammering led her to the rear. A man of some sixty-odd years was engaged in making a new shelf. As he saw her the hammer dropped from his hand.

"Good morning," said Penny in her friendliest tone. "Are you Mr. Saal?"

"That's me," he replied, regarding her curiously.

"Excuse me for bothering you," apologized Penny, "but I should like to interview you for my newspaper."

Mr. Saal's intelligent but somewhat child-like eyes fixed her in a steady stare.

"A reporter," he said finally in a long suffering tone. "They wouldn't respect a man's privacy—or anything else for that matter, I reckon."

"There is one thing I am sure all reporters respect, Mr. Saal," responded Penny. "Art. From the samples of your work which I saw out front I am sure you are a great tattoo artist."

Mr. Saal melted like a lump of butter on a hot stove. Penny had struck his weakest spot.

"You flatter me," he said, a faint pattern of a smile etching his face. "I admit I'm good, although maybe not quite the best in the business. What do you want to know?"

"A story about the tattooing business in general and you in particular, Mr. Saal. How do you do it? How did you start? Who was the most famous person you ever tattooed? What is your favorite design? Do you think a tattoo looks better on the arm or the chest? What—?"

"Hold it, young lady, hold it. You seem to be a living question mark."

Mr. Saal motioned for Penny to follow him to the front of the shop. As he offered her a chair she took

a quick glance at a row of dirty, smeary bottles of chemicals on a shelf above her head.

"Now let's take your first question," said Mr. Saal, seating himself opposite the girl. "I can't tell you how to tattoo—that's a secret of the profession."

"How much do you charge for one?"

"Depends upon how much a fellow is willing to pay. Take this town—it's a cheap place. Nobody has any money. The King of England paid fifty dollars for his tattoo and what do I get? I'm lucky if it's a dollar. And mostly hoodlums to work on. You can't give a man much of a tattoo for a dollar."

"Do you ever remove tattoos, Mr. Saal?"

"It's against the law," the man replied briefly.

"I didn't know that," said Penny in surprise. "Why?"

"Crooks can be identified by their tattoos. Oh, it's easy for a fellow to get one on, but not so easy to get it off."

"But it can be done?" Penny persisted. "Have you ever removed one?"

"I'm the only man in the state who can take off a tattoo so it doesn't show," boasted Mr. Saal. "The surgeons have tried, but you always can see where it was."

"Tell me about some of the tattoos you've removed," urged Penny.

"I've told you more than I should now," said Mr. Saal. "You'll print it in the paper and then I'll get into trouble with the police."

"This will be strictly confidential," promised Penny.

"It's this way," Mr. Saal justified himself. "I never do any work for crooks—not me. But if a law-abiding, respectable citizen comes here and says he's sick of his tattoo, then sometimes I take it off for him if he's willing to pay the price. Fact is, I'm workin' on a mighty interesting case right now. It's a design that's rare—an octopus."

Penny did not trust herself to speak for a moment. Carefully she controlled her voice as she said casually:

"How interesting, Mr. Saal. An octopus tattoo! Was the man a sailor?"

"He was an old salt all right, though he denied it."

"What is his name?"

"I couldn't tell you that," answered Mr. Saal. "I have to protect my customers."

"Tell me more about the tattoo," urged Penny.

"It's just a figure about so large—" Mr. Saal demonstrated with his hands, "on the man's back. Funny place for a tattoo, ain't it?"

"I should say so," agreed Penny. "Is it merely a figure of an octopus? No words or anything like that?"

"There are two words. I took 'em off last week."

"Two?" inquired Penny. "What are they, Mr. Saal?"

"They don't make sense. The words are *For One.*"

"I once saw an octopus tattoo such as you describe," declared Penny. "But I distinctly recall that the design used only a single word. It was *One.*"

"Is that so?" inquired Mr. Saal. "Maybe the tattoo isn't as uncommon as I thought. But I never saw one like it before."

"I wonder what can be the significance of the words?"

"I was asking my customer about it. He pretended he didn't know, but I figure maybe he and some buddies had a sentence tattooed on 'em."

"You mean that if one were able to read several tattoos together, the words would make sense?"

"That's right," nodded Mr. Saal. "I don't know about this octopus tattoo, but I figure it may have been that way."

"Did your customer have any other tattoos on his body?" Penny questioned. "An anchor, for instance?"

"Didn't notice 'em if he did."

"I suppose it takes a long while to remove a tattoo. Does your customer come often?"

"Every Tuesday and Thursday night. He complains because I don't do the work faster, but I tell him if he wants a good job it has to be done carefully."

Before Penny could ask another question, two young sailors swaggered into the shop. Ellis Saal, scenting business, immediately arose.

"Be careful what you write up," he warned as he left her. "There's been a lot of articles on tattooin', but not a one that's right. It just ain't possible for a reporter to write a true story unless it's about a murder or a fire!"

"I'll be careful," promised Penny.

Leaving the shop, she walked slowly to her parked car. The information obtained from the tattoo artist both excited and mystified her.

"I don't believe Mr. Saal could have been mistaken about the words which were incorporated in the design," she thought. "And I'm equally certain I wasn't mistaken about Anchor Joe's tattoo. It had only the single word, 'One.' "

Mr. Saal's declaration that his customer was not the possessor of a tattooed anchor caused Penny to wonder if the person could be Joe Landa. However, the man was wanted by government agents and it seemed reasonable to believe that he might seek to remove telltale markings.

"I know what I'll do," she decided. "Thursday night I'll watch Mr. Saal's shop. In that way I may be able to learn the identity of his mysterious customer!"

CHAPTER

18

PAULETTA'S EXPLANATION

PENNY COMPRESSED the facts given her by Ellis Saal into a brief, lively feature story for the *Weekly Times*. She was careful not to divulge that the man had removed a tattoo from a customer, but to Louise she confided the entire story.

"All unwittingly, Mr. Saal gave me just the clue I need," she declared enthusiastically. "It will be a gigantic step forward if I learn the identity of his mysterious customer."

"What's to be gained by it?" asked Louise as she slugged a story and speared it on a hook. "What will be proven?"

"Well, if I'm ever going to solve the mystery I must gather every fact I can," Penny said defensively. "I aim to learn the meaning of those strange tattoos and, above all, the reason why John Munn was pushed from the bridge."

"You have your work cut out for you," responded Louise dryly.

"But Mr. Saal's information helps. You remember I told you that John Munn's tattoo bore the word *All.* Anchor Joe's was exactly the same except for the word, *One.* And now Ellis Saal has a customer with two words on his back: *For One.* Why, I believe I have it!"

Penny sprang from her chair, eyes dancing with excitement.

"You have what?" asked Louise calmly.

"It came to me like a flash—the meaning of those tattooed words! If we haven't been dumb!"

"Kindly stop jumping around and explain."

"Mr. Saal told me he thought several sailors might have had a sentence incorporated in their tattoo. That is, only a word or two was used in each design, but taken as a whole it would make sense."

"And you think you have the phrase?"

"I do, Louise! Why couldn't it be: *All for one, one for all?*"

"If the men were close friends, that would be fairly logical. But the words we have to juggle don't make such a sentence, Penny."

"Obviously there must be a fourth sailor whose tattoo includes the words, 'for all,' " argued Penny. "Then it would fit perfectly."

"Just because four men were pals, you think they would have such nonsense tattooed on their backs?"

"That's my theory."

"If you're right, then the mystery is solved."

"Far from it," corrected Penny. "I haven't learned who pushed John Munn from the bridge or why. You remember how Anchor Joe talked about someone who had 'ratted'? The four of them must have been in on a scheme, and one man betrayed his comrades."

"Better bridle that imagination before it takes you for too wild a ride," chuckled Louise.

"Then you think there's nothing to my theory?" Penny demanded in an injured tone.

"I think that if you speculate upon it much longer we'll never get any work done," Louise replied, turning once more to her typewriter. "These headlines must be composed if ever we expect to get another paper on the street."

Disappointed that her chum did not take the matter more seriously, Penny went to consult Old Horney in the composing room. The pressman had proven to be worth many times the small salary which the girls paid him. Not only had he made the rotary presses ready for service, but he had cleaned and oiled every useable piece of machinery in the building. Eagerly

he awaited the day when Penny would print the *Weekly* in her own plant.

"Everything's all set," he told her with a worshipful grin. "Whenever you give the word, we can go to press."

"That's fine," Penny praised. "Louise and I have been having a few difficulties, financial and otherwise. But I hope it won't be long now."

She talked with Old Horney about various technical problems, then returned to her desk. Slipping a sheet of paper into her typewriter, she composed a letter to a well known steamship, the *Dorasky*.

Slipping it into her pocket, she opened the door of Louise's office.

"Do you mind staying here alone for awhile?"

"No, of course not. Where are you going?"

"To mail an important letter. Then I want to drive out to Fenestra's farm and see Mrs. Weems."

"I'll look after everything until you get back," Louise promised. She glanced curiously at the letter but did not ask to whom it was directed.

Penny dropped the stamped envelope into a convenient corner mailbox, and then drove toward the outskirts of the city. Nearing Drexel Boulevard it suddenly occurred to her that she never had found time to revisit Matthew Judson's home.

"Pauletta owes me an explanation for the way she acted the other day," she thought. "I have a notion to stop and see if she's alone."

Penny impulsively spun the wheel, and followed the boulevard to the Judson home. The iron gate stood open. She drove through, up the curve of cement to the house.

In response to her knock, an untidy colored maid admitted her to a dark, dusty living room. As she awaited Pauletta, her wandering gaze noted a number of significant details. The walls had not been decorated in many years, upholstered furniture had assumed a moth-eaten appearance, and the entire room seemed spiritless.

Pauletta came slowly down the circular stairway. She hesitated as she recognized Penny, but could not retreat.

"How do you do," she said somewhat stiffly. "Nice of you to call."

"I think you know why I came," said Penny. "We were unable to talk when I was here before."

"I've told you all there was to it," Pauletta declared, seating herself opposite the girl. "Frankly, I can't see that the affair is any of your concern. I wore the disguise because I didn't wish to be recognized on board the *Goodtime*."

"Your explanation isn't very satisfactory, I'm afraid. Tillie Fellows is staying at our home now."

"What of it?"

"She was robbed that night on the boat."

"We discussed it before," Miss Judson said in exasperation. "You insult me by suggesting that I may have snatched the girl's pocketbook! Why should I steal when my father is wealthy? I've always had everything I want."

"I should like very much to believe you," said Penny quietly. "But unless you are willing to offer a complete explanation, I am afraid I can't."

"Very well, if I must, I'll tell," Miss Judson replied angrily. "You may have read in the newspapers that I am engaged to marry Major Howard Atchley?"

"The story escaped me."

"I admire Howard very much," resumed Pauletta, still in an icy tone. "He comes from an excellent family, is well-to-do, and in Father's opinion will make me a good husband."

"Your opinion differs?" Penny inquired softly.

"I do not love Howard, and I never shall. On the night you saw me aboard the *Goodtime* I had gone with another friend of mine, Carl Feldman, intending to enjoy the excursion trip."

"Your father knew nothing about it?"

"I told him I was going with another girl."

"Oh, I see."

"There was nothing wrong about it," Pauletta said irritably. "But I'm fairly well known. I realized that if I were recognized, Father or Howard might learn about it. Then there would be trouble, for Howard is a very jealous person."

"So you resorted to the wig and glasses?"

"Yes, that was my sole reason. Major Atchley met me at the boat. Before joining him I threw the bundle of clothing into the river. Now are you satisfied with my explanation?"

"I am," said Penny. "In fact, I never believed that you had robbed Tillie."

"You certainly acted that way."

"Perhaps, I only wanted to learn the truth."

Miss Judson did not reply. Her cold stare made it evident that she disliked Penny and regarded her as a meddler.

"Is there anything else you wish to know?" she asked after a lengthy silence.

"Nothing, Miss Judson. I was only thinking that I would like to help you and your father."

"Thank you. We don't require assistance."

"Perhaps you don't," said Penny, "but your father needs friends. He admitted to me that if it weren't for you he would be tempted to end everything."

The words stunned Pauletta. "Father never said that!" she exclaimed.

"He did."

"I can't believe it. Why, Father's the most cheerful person in the world!"

"In your presence, possibly. The loss of the *Morning Press* must have been a heavy blow to him."

"Father wasn't forced to give up the paper," Pauletta protested. "He did it because he was tired of working so hard."

"Was that what he told you?"

"Why, yes. I know of no other reason."

"The general belief seems to be that your father speculated on the stock market, losing large sums of money."

"That can't be true," denied Pauletta. "To my knowledge Father never gambled. He may have bought a few stocks from time to time, but only for investment."

"Then you feel sure he did not dispose of the *Press* because he needed money?"

Pauletta hesitated before she answered. "It never occurred to me before, but Father has been rather close the past year. I thought it was sheer carelessness when he let this place run down. He always gave me everything I wanted."

"Why does he favor your marriage to the Major?"

"Perhaps money does enter into it," Pauletta said slowly. "Many times Father has reminded me that I would have every luxury as Howard's wife."

"Your friend Carl is poor?"

"He has a fairly good position, but not much money. Father always seemed to like Carl. That was why I couldn't understand when he asked me not to see him again."

"I am sure your father thinks only of your welfare."

"But I would rather marry Carl and be poor always than to have riches with Howard."

"You've not told your father that?"

"Why, no. It never occurred to me that money had influenced him."

"There's another rumor," said Penny. "I suppose I shouldn't mention it."

"I wish you would."

"I've heard it said that your father disposed of the *Press* because he had been blackmailed."

"By whom?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. It was only a rumor."

"There may be truth in it," Pauletta replied in a low voice. "You've opened my eyes, Miss Parker. I've been very blind."

"Then you think someone may have forced your father to pay money?"

"I don't know. But Father has acted strangely ever

since he gave up the paper. Once a month, on the fourth, he receives a visit from a queer looking man. Always he tries to get me out of the house before the fellow comes."

"Don't you know his name?"

"No, Father has never told me. The man seldom stays longer than ten minutes."

"Can you describe him?"

"Not very well because I never saw him at close range. I should say he's middle-aged, dark and cruel looking. Not at all the sort Father would choose for a friend."

"Your father offers no explanation as to why the man comes?"

"None. He refuses to discuss the subject. I've noticed, though, that for days after the fellow leaves he's very nervous and uneasy."

"Excuse me for asking so many questions, Miss Judson, but do you know of any reason why your father might be blackmailed?"

"No, I don't. I am sure he's never been involved in anything dishonorable."

Penny had no more to tell, and she was convinced that Pauletta had given a truthful account of the situation. Feeling that she was not particularly welcome, she arose to leave.

"I am glad you came," Pauletta said, extending her

hand. "Please excuse my rudeness. There were so many things I failed to understand."

"You must forgive me, too," replied Penny. "I didn't mean to meddle. I truly want to help your father."

"I wish I could help him, too," said Pauletta in a troubled voice. "In the past I fear I've been very selfish and inconsiderate."

"There's a way to help if you're willing to do it."

"I don't understand."

"You say that on the fourth of each month a man comes here to see your father. If you tried could you learn his name?"

"I might drop in upon them at an awkward moment, compelling Father to introduce me."

"Are you willing to do it?"

"Why, yes, but I fail to see what will be gained."

"Perhaps nothing, perhaps a great deal," replied Penny. "If the man is a blackmailer, it should help for us to know his name."

"I'll learn what I can."

"Then until the fourth, good-bye. And please, not a word to Mr. Judson. We must work secretly."

Reflecting upon the information given her by Pauletta, Penny drove on toward Peter Fenestra's home. A quarter of a mile away she parked the car, and set off afoot, hoping to attract no attention should the owner be at home.

It was well that she took the precaution. She was three hundred yards from the grounds when suddenly she saw a man emerge from behind the barn. At a glance she observed that he was too short to be Peter Fenestra.

As Penny paused to watch, the man moved stealthily across the yard to the front door of the farmhouse. His face turned slightly in her direction, and she recognized Anchor Joe.

"What can he be doing here?" she thought in amazement.

The question soon was answered. Glancing quickly about, Anchor Joe dropped a white envelope on the front porch. Then he pounded several times on the door before darting to the shelter of the lilac bushes.

CHAPTER

19

MRS. WEEMS' REPORT

SEVERAL MINUTES elapsed before the door was opened by Peter Fenestra. He glanced alertly about the yard, and then his gaze fell upon the envelope. Penny heard him mutter to himself as he picked it up.

Fenestra's face became convulsed with rage as he tore open the flap and saw the message. Still muttering, he crumpled the paper and thrust it into his pocket. Entering the house, he slammed the door.

With Peter at home Penny dared not try to see Mrs. Weems. As she hesitated, debating, Anchor Joe came from his hiding place. He did not see the girl.

"Joe!" she called softly.

The sailor turned. Recognizing her, he ran in the opposite direction across the yard. Keeping low behind a hedge, he started toward the river.

"Joe! Come back!" Penny called again.

Paying no heed, the sailor fled through the fields. Soon he was hidden by tall trees and bushes.

Penny felt deeply disturbed, wondering if Anchor Joe made a practice of watching the Fenestra home. She was inclined to believe that this had not been his first visit there.

Unexpectedly the farmhouse door swung open. Penny barely had time to step behind a large maple before Peter Fenestra came down the path. He went directly to the barn, and a few minutes later backed out his automobile.

"Good!" thought Penny. "He's likely driving to Riverview. Now I can talk to Mrs. Weems without fear of interruption."

As soon as the car had disappeared down the main road, she ran to the kitchen door and knocked. When it was not opened immediately, she thrust her head inside and called the housekeeper's name.

"Here I am," answered Mrs. Weems, hurrying from the dining room. "I hope you've come to take me home, Penny Parker!"

"No, only to receive your report." Penny sank into a chair beside the stove. "You don't act very pleased with your new job."

"It's a dreadful place. I was crazy to say I would stay here."

"Haven't you learned anything?"

"I've learned that Peter Fenestra is one of the most disagreeable men I ever met in my life! There's no

satisfying him. He requires a slave, not a housekeeper!"

"But what about the storm cave?" Penny asked. "Were you able to find out what Fenestra stores in it?"

"Of course not. The padlock always is locked, and he keeps the key in his pocket."

"But he does have something hidden there?" Penny questioned eagerly. "He goes down into it at night?"

"I've seen him enter the cave once since I came here."

"When was that?"

"Last night after I had gone to bed. I heard the door close, so I went to the window and watched."

"How long did he stay there, Mrs. Weems?"

"About three hours I'd judge. It was after two o'clock when he returned to his room."

"What *can* he have hidden in the cave?"

"Nothing in my opinion," declared Mrs. Weems. "I think he cooks something. At least he builds a fire."

"What makes you think that?"

"I could see smoke seeping out from the cracks of the cave door."

Penny frowned. "I can't guess what he could be cooking," she said. "Surely he doesn't have a still down there."

"I doubt it very much. Probably you've built up a great mystery about nothing."

Pouring hot water over the dishes, Mrs. Weems be-

gan to wash them. Penny picked up a towel and automatically wiped and stacked them away.

"I didn't imagine that this house was being watched," she replied. "Only a few minutes ago I saw Anchor Joe steal to the door and leave a letter for Mr. Fenestra."

"Anchor Joe!"

"Mr. Moyer never caught him it seems. But why should the fellow come here? What message did he leave Fenestra?"

"I heard a knock on the front door," Mrs. Weems admitted. "Fenestra answered it, and when he came back into the kitchen he was in a dreadful temper."

"The letter upset him?"

"I didn't know he had received one."

"Yes, Anchor Joe left it on the doorstep. It may have been a threatening note. I'd give a lot to know."

"Fenestra has been very nervous since I came here," Mrs. Weems contributed. "If he hears any unusual sound in the yard he immediately becomes alert."

"As if he were afraid for his life?"

"Yes, he does act that way. I doubt if he'll stay here much longer. His clothes are all packed in suitcases."

"That *is* important information," declared Penny. "Oh, dear, if only we knew why he's being threatened, and why he intends to leave! I believe I'll go upstairs and inspect his room."

"You'll learn nothing there," responded Mrs. Weems. "Fenestra is a careful man. He leaves no papers lying about."

"It will do no harm to look."

Penny climbed the creaking stairs and was followed by Mrs. Weems.

"This is his room," said the housekeeper, opening a door. "I haven't made the bed yet."

She busied herself smoothing covers while Penny wandered about. The room had no rug. It was furnished with an old fashioned dresser, a wash stand and a bed with a high headboard.

Penny opened the closet door. The hangers were dangling together, without clothing. Everything had been packed into two suitcases which stood against the wall.

"I've already inspected the luggage," said Mrs. Weems as the girl bent to open one of the bags. "You'll find nothing except clothing. I tell you, Peter Fenestra is a very cautious man."

"I can believe it," agreed Penny. "This room is as bare of evidence as Mother Hubbard's cupboard."

"Just what do you hope to find?"

"Well, I don't know. What's this?" Penny picked up a sheet of notebook paper from the dresser.

"Don't get excited over that," laughed Mrs. Weems.

"It's only a grocery list which Fenestra made up. He doesn't trust anyone to spend his money for him."

"Is this Fenestra's writing?" Penny studied the paper with intense interest.

"Yes, it is."

"Mrs. Weems, I've seen this writing before!" Penny exclaimed. "I'm almost certain of it. There's a marked resemblance!"

"A resemblance to what, Penny?"

"Why, to a threatening note I received. I guess I never told you. Someone left a message on my desk at the newspaper office, warning me to give up my paper."

"And you think Peter Fenestra left it there?" inquired the housekeeper, smiling.

"This looks like the same writing."

"Probably you are mistaken, Penny. Why should he have any interest in your paper?"

"He came to the office one day, questioning me about a story I ran concerning John Munn. I shall keep this and compare it with the note."

Carefully folding the paper, Penny slipped it into her dress pocket. Mrs. Weems had finished making the bed and was ready to leave.

"I've learned everything I can for you," she said. "Now I hope you're willing to let me return home."

"Please stay another day," pleaded Penny. "I feel in my bones that we're about to make an important discovery."

"Those bones of yours!" complained the housekeeper. "Tell me, how is Tillie Fellows getting along?"

"Well, she tries hard, but I'll admit Dad doesn't like the arrangement."

"Then I must return. It's nonsense for me to stay here."

Penny was paying no attention to Mrs. Weems' words. She had picked up the waste paper basket and was examining the contents. There were a few advertising circulars, an unaddressed envelope and a crumpled ball of paper. The latter, Penny carefully smoothed.

"Mrs. Weems!" she exclaimed. "Look at this!"

The housekeeper hastened to her side. Curiously, she examined the paper. It bore no writing, only a crude drawing of an octopus.

"This must be the paper which Anchor Joe left on the doorstep only a few minutes ago!" cried Penny excitedly.

"You think it may have been intended as a warning to Peter Fenestra?" The housekeeper regarded the drawing rather dubiously.

"I'm sure of it, Mrs. Weems! Don't you see? The

drawing is a copy of the tattoo which both Anchor Joe and John Munn had on their backs!"

"Yes, it does look the same as Joe's marking," conceded the housekeeper. "But what does it mean? Why was it sent to Fenestra?"

"I wish I knew."

"One thing is clear. That boatman your father hired is a downright scamp."

"He's wanted by the government. We know that. But Fenestra may be a rascal, too. Why should Anchor Joe threaten him unless he's done something he shouldn't?"

"Why indeed? This is a case for the police, not one for you or me," declared Mrs. Weems with finality. "I am ready to leave here whenever you are. I've decided not to bother giving Fenestra notice."

"You can't go now. You can't!" moaned Penny. "Stay until after Thursday, at least. I'm positive everything will be cleared up by then."

"Why Thursday?"

"Well, I have a little matter coming up on that day. Besides, I've sent off a letter which may help solve the mystery. Please, Mrs. Weems, do this one favor and I'll never ask another."

"Until next time, you mean. But to please you I'll stay until Friday. Not a day longer. However, I warn

you, if I see Anchor Joe prowling about, I shall summon the sheriff."

"That's all right with me," grinned Penny. "I must skip now before Fenestra gets back from town. Just keep your eye on him and report to me if anything unusual happens."

CHAPTER

20

PICNIC BY MOONLIGHT

PENNY HAD never found it necessary to explain fully to her father what had become of Mrs. Weems. She had mentioned rather carelessly that the housekeeper was helping out at the Fenestra home for a few days, and he had accepted the substitution of Tillie Fellows without too many questions.

At breakfast on Wednesday morning, the publisher waited until Tillie had gone to the kitchen, and then asked in an undertone:

"How much longer is this to continue? When is Mrs. Weems coming home?"

"Friday morning, Dad. Don't you like Tillie's cooking?"

"It's awful," he whispered. "These eggs taste as if they had been fried in lard."

"They were," chuckled Penny. "Tillie was brought up to be frugal. She never wastes butter."

The discussion was brought to an abrupt end by

the appearance of Tillie. Mr. Parker immediately switched to another subject, that of a barbecue picnic which he gave each summer to the *Star* employes. Penny had forgotten that the outing was scheduled for that night at the cottage.

"I'm glad you reminded me, Dad," she said. "I'll be there with bells to eat my share of roast beef. Mind if I bring Old Horney?"

"Invite him if you like," replied Mr. Parker. "But no others. This is a newspaper picnic, not a bread line as you made it last year."

After school that afternoon Penny worked as usual at the *Times* office. She was busy figuring advertising space when she glanced up and saw Fred Clousky standing in the doorway.

"Are—are you busy?" asked the boy diffidently.

"Yes, I am," said Penny with discouraging brevity.

"I don't want to bother you," Fred murmured, "but I was wondering—do you have a job for me around here? I'd like to work on a real paper. Being editor of *Chatter* is okay but you don't get any practical experience."

"Oh, so you want a job?" inquired Penny. Inclined to give him a short answer, she thought better of it. "Everything considered," she said, "what you need, Fred, is to learn about different kinds of type. It's so

easy to get name-plates and various headlines mixed!"

Fred kept his gaze on his shoes.

"I have just the job for you," resumed Penny. "You can sort and clean the type when it's broken out of the page forms. If you do that well, perhaps you can work up later on."

"When do I start?" Fred asked in a crushed voice.

Penny was surprised for she had expected him to decline such a dirty, menial job. In a far more friendly tone she directed him to seek Old Horney who would be found in the composing room.

"Fred isn't so bad after all," she thought after he had gone. "I'll give him an office job next week."

Penny returned to her work. In need of an extra sheet of paper, she tried to open the lower drawer of her desk. It was stuck fast. She tugged at it several times, finally pulling it out entirely. A folded newspaper clipping dropped to the floor.

Wondering what it might be, she picked it up. The torn sheet, yellow with age, bore the picture of a young man. The face was vaguely familiar although the name beneath it read, Matthew Jewel.

"Matthew Jewel," she whispered. "But it's Matthew Judson! Judson as a young man. He must have changed his name!"

The two column headline drew her attention.

MATTHEW JEWEL BEGINS
TEN YEAR SENTENCE IN
NEW YORK PRISON FOR MIS-
APPROPRIATION OF BANK FUNDS

The clipping, she noted, had been cut from a New York paper and was dated twenty years earlier. It reported Matthew Jewel's conviction, following an admission that he had stolen two thousand dollars belonging to the Berkley Savings Bank.

Penny studied the picture again. Not the slightest doubt entered her mind that the young man of the story and Matthew Judson were the same individual. Evidently the clipping had been saved by the former publisher, and in some manner had become lodged beneath the drawer.

"I'm sure no one in Riverview ever knew that Judson served a term in prison," she thought. "He came here years ago with his daughter, and to all appearances had led an upright life."

After perusing the item again, she returned it to the drawer which she carefully locked. She knew that the information was of utmost importance. Was it not possible that she had stumbled upon a motivation for Judson's strange behavior of the past year? Could not the data contained in the clipping have provided an unscrupulous person with a basis for blackmail?

"But why should Judson ruin his career rather than face exposure?" she reflected. "Other men have made mistakes in their youth and started over again. The truth might have humiliated him, but Riverview people would have taken a charitable attitude."

Deeply troubled, Penny gathered together her belongings and went in search of Old Horney. Finding him initiating Fred Clousky in his new duties, she discreetly invited him to attend the picnic.

"Thank you mightily," responded the pressman, "but I'm not dressed for it. These pants are so shiny you could use 'em for a mirror."

"Don't you worry about your clothes, Horney. Besides, it will be so dark no one will notice. Dad gave you a special invitation."

"Did he now?" The old pressman could not hide his pleasure. "Well, if you think he really wants me, maybe I'll go."

"You wash up while I get the car," Penny urged. "We're rather late."

Within ten minutes, Old Horney met her at the front entrance. His hair was combed, he wore a frayed coat, and had contrived to polish his shoes.

"Horney," Penny said abruptly as they drove toward the river, "did you ever hear that Matthew Judson had been in trouble before he gave up his paper?"

"You mean financial?" the pressman inquired.

"No, I meant of a personal nature. I've been thinking over your theory that Judson was blackmailed."

"Maybe I oughtn't to have said what I did. It was just my own idea."

"I'm inclined to believe there may be something to it, Horney. Now supposing that Judson had stolen money or had been in prison—"

"It couldn't have been that," interrupted the pressman. "Why, Judson was so honest he bent over backwards."

Penny was tempted to tell Horney about the clipping, but refrained from doing so. However, she was satisfied that employes of the *Morning Press* had gained no inkling of Mr. Judson's prison record.

The picnic was well under way by the time Penny and the pressman arrived at the river cottage. A caterer had taken complete charge, and with his crew of helpers, prepared to serve nearly two hundred boisterous, hungry newspaper employes.

Always a favorite, Penny immediately was surrounded by a group of friends. Assured that Horney had found welcome with pressmen acquaintances, she entered wholeheartedly into the frivolity.

Jerry Livingston, frowning away all other young men, became her escort for the evening. After supper had been served, he guided her firmly away from the group.

"We don't want to hear any speeches," he said. "Let's go look at the moon."

"Can't we see it here?" countered Penny.

"A moon to be appreciated properly must be seen from a sandy beach," chuckled Jerry. "Preferably from a nice comfortable shoulder."

Breaking away, Penny raced ahead of him, along the beach to the suspension bridge. She was halfway across when he overtook her, rocking it so violently that she had to cling to him for support.

"Stop that, Jerry Livingston! You'll break the bridge!"

"Then don't try to run away from me. Will you let me show you the moon?"

"No, I know you, Jerry. You show it to all the girls."

"If I do, it's just as a rehearsal. You see, Penny, I've hoped that someday I might get a chance to show it to you."

"What a line you have," laughed Penny. "But I won't play. As a moon-shower your technique is terrible. Better practice some more."

Jerry chuckled and slipping his hand in hers, led her on across the bridge.

"If you won't look at the moon," he said, "then take a squint at Old Man River."

"I believe I prefer the moon after all," Penny re-

turned, raising her eyes to the disc of light sailing serenely through the star-pricked sky. "It *is* beautiful."

Her reverie was broken by Jerry's voice. His hand tightened on her own.

"Penny!" he exclaimed. "Look over there!"

Farther down the river in an open space, the forms of two struggling men were silhouetted in the moonlight.

"Oh, Jerry," Penny cried, "they're fighting!"

"And to the death," added Jerry grimly. "Come on, before it's too late!"

CHAPTER

21

ELLIS SAAL'S CUSTOMER

PENNY FOLLOWED the reporter, quickly overtaking him. Their pounding footsteps were heard by the two men who abruptly ceased their desperate struggles. Observing the pair, they turned and fled, one toward the river, the other toward the road.

"Well, we broke that up in a hurry!" exclaimed Jerry. "Wonder what made them run?"

"They must have been afraid we would recognize them," answered Penny. "Didn't you think that one man looked like Peter Fenestra?"

"I never have seen him to my knowledge. He was the fellow who ran along the river?"

"No, the other. Fenestra's farmhouse is across the fields." Penny pointed toward a light shining dimly from a window.

"They've both disappeared now," Jerry commented, moving to the river bank. "Wonder how the row started anyway?"

"Fenestra has been threatened," revealed Penny. "Yesterday Anchor Joe left a drawing of an octopus on his doorstep."

"What was the idea?"

"It must have been intended as a warning of some sort. Anchor Joe, and other men, too, keep watch of the house."

"How did you learn that, Penny?"

"I've made observations. Besides, Tillie Fellows, who worked there, told me what she had seen. Fenestra is afraid for his life."

"Maybe it was Anchor Joe who attacked him tonight."

"It may have been. I wish we could have seen those men at close range."

Penny walked on to the clearing where the pair had fought. Grass had been beaten down over a large area, indicating that the struggle had not been a brief one. A shiny object gleamed in the moonlight. Penny picked it up, then called softly to Jerry who had remained by the river bank.

"What is it?" he asked, coming quickly to her side.

"I've found a key, Jerry! It was lying here on the ground."

"One of the men must have lost it from his pocket."

"This may have been what they were fighting over, Jerry!"

"What makes you think that?"

"Doesn't the key look as if it belonged to a padlock?"

"Yes, it does, Penny."

"Then I am convinced this key will fit the lock on Peter Fenestra's storm cellar! His attacker was trying to get it away from him!"

"Just a minute," remonstrated Jerry. "You're traveling too fast for me. Explain the storm cellar part."

"You'll promise not to use anything I tell you for the *Star?*"

"That's fair enough."

Satisfied that Jerry would keep his promise, Penny told him everything she had learned at the Fenestra farm. The reporter asked many questions about the storm cave.

"So you believe this key may unlock the door?" he mused.

"I'd like to try it, at least."

"Now?"

"There never will be a better time. Mrs. Weems thinks that Fenestra is getting ready to leave Riverview."

Jerry hesitated only briefly. "All right, I'm with you," he said. "Lead the way."

They were leaving the river when both were startled to hear the suspension bridge creak beneath human

weight. As they paused, listening, a familiar voice called:

"Jerry! Hey, Jerry!"

"Here!" responded the reporter.

A figure emerged from the trees, and they recognized Salt Sommers, the *Star* photographer.

"Say, I've been lookin' everywhere for you," he complained. "You're wanted back in Riverview."

"What is this, a gag?" Jerry asked suspiciously.

"It's no gag. The Fulton Powder Company just blew up. Joe, and Gus, and Philips are already on their way. Dewitt sent me to get you."

"The Fulton Powder Plant!" Jerry exclaimed, falling into step with Salt. "That's a big story!"

"It sure is, and we're late! Get a move on, brother."

Jerry glanced toward Penny, remembering that she too had a "story" to be covered.

"We'll go to Fenestra's place tomorrow," he promised hurriedly.

Knowing that Penny might try to investigate the cave alone, he hooked his arm through hers, pulling her along.

"Back you go to camp," he said. "This is no place for a little girl at night."

Penny's protests went unheeded. Jerry and Salt marched her between them to the cottage. Uncere-

moniously turning her over to her father, they leaped into a press car, and were gone.

Hours later the picnic came to an end. Riding home with her father after taking Horney to the *Times* building, Penny was startled to observe a light in an upstairs window of the Parker house.

"Why, that's in Mrs. Weems' room!" she exclaimed. "She can't be home!"

Penny was mistaken. Upon hastening upstairs to investigate, she was met at the bedroom door by the housekeeper.

"Why, Mrs. Weems! I thought you intended to stay on the farm until tomorrow!"

"I decided a few hours would make no difference. Penny, the place was unbearable."

"How did you get home?"

"By taxicab."

"Oh, I wish you had stayed one day longer," sighed Penny. "Did you learn anything since I saw you last?"

"Nothing of value. Fenestra came home a short time before I left. He was in a dreadful temper."

"Had he been in a fight?" Penny asked quickly.

"There was a black and blue mark across his cheek."

"Then I was right!" exclaimed Penny triumphantly. "I wish I knew for certain who attacked him."

Questioned by Mrs. Weems, she described the

scene witnessed at the river, and proudly displayed the key.

"Why, it does resemble one I've seen Fenestra use," declared the housekeeper.

"Then it must unlock the cave! Tomorrow I'll go there and find out!"

"You'll do no such thing," replied Mrs. Weems firmly. "That is, not without your father's permission."

"But you know Dad won't be in favor of it," groaned Penny. "I simply must go there and get a scoop for the *Weekly*."

"No, Penny, you need to be protected from your own recklessness. Your father must be consulted before you visit the farm again."

"Either he'll say I can't go, or if he thinks there's anything to the story, he'll turn it over to a *Star* reporter. Whichever he does, I lose."

"Penny, I am in no mood to listen to your pleadings," Mrs. Weems said wearily. "If you'll excuse me, I'll go to bed."

Grumbling at the decision, Penny went to her own room. She did not feel equal to a spirited discussion with her father that night.

"Here, I'm on the verge of solving a great mystery," she grieved. "Perhaps the most stupendous of my life! And now I'm told I must stay away from Fenestra's farm. It's enough to turn my hair gray."

Penny overslept the next morning, barely awakening in time to reach school by nine o'clock. A surprise oral history quiz caught her completely unprepared. She missed three questions in succession, and was told that she must remain after school for a special study session.

Released at four-thirty, Penny hastened to the *Star* office. Neither her father nor Jerry were there, nor could anyone tell her when they would return. Discouraged, she sought Louise who as usual was working at the *Times* plant.

"Such luck as I am having," Penny complained. "Mrs. Weems says I can't go to Fenestra's farm without Dad's permission, and he's hiding from me."

"I wish you would forget that storm cave and the octopus tattoo," said Louise unsympathetically. "Maybe then we could get out another issue of this old paper."

Penny gazed at her rather queerly. "You're sick of it, aren't you?" she asked.

"No," Louise denied, "it's been fun, and we've learned a lot. But there's so much work. It never ends."

"It will soon," replied Penny quietly. "Our advertisers are dropping off one by one. Sales are falling, too."

"We always can quit," said Louise cheerfully.

"No, we can't," Penny's mouth drew into a tight

line. "Fred Clousky would taunt me to my dying day. I'll never close the plant except in a blaze of journalistic glory!"

"But you just said we're failing—"

"What the *Weekly* needs and must have is a tremendous story! Somehow I'm going to get it!"

"You're nothing if not persistent," said Louise admiringly. "Oh, before I forget it, Old Horney has been up here several times inquiring for you."

"More bad news I suppose."

"He didn't say why he wished to talk with you. I thought he seemed rather disturbed, though."

"I'll see what he wants."

Penny sought Horney in the composing department and pressroom, and even ventured into the basement. The old man was not to be found. Concluding that he had left the building, she gave up the search.

She helped Louise read proof until six o'clock, and then telephoned home to inquire if her father were there. Learning from Mrs. Weems that he did not expect to come until later, she decided to remain downtown for her own dinner.

"Why don't you stay with me, Lou?" she invited. "Afterwards, I'll take you on a little adventure."

"Not to Fenestra's?" her chum demanded suspiciously.

"Unfortunately, no. I shall do a bit of spade work

by watching Ellis Saal's shop. This is Thursday, you know."

"It will be a long, tedious wait."

"I'll consider it well worth the time if I learn the identity of Saal's customer. You don't care to come?"

"On the contrary, I do. I'll telephone Mother."

The girls dined at a café not far from the *Weekly Times* and soon thereafter stationed themselves a half block from Ellis Saal's shop. An hour elapsed. Several times they became hopeful as persons paused to gaze at the exhibits in the show window, but no one entered. A cold wind made their vigil increasingly uncomfortable.

"If we don't get action in another fifteen minutes I am going home," chattered Louise.

A clock struck eight-thirty. Five minutes later Penny observed a familiar figure coming briskly down the street. She touched her chum's arm.

"It's Peter Fenestra," Louise murmured. "You don't think he's the one?"

"We'll soon see."

Fenestra was too far away to notice the girls. As they watched, he walked to the doorway of Ellis Saal's shop. Quickly he glanced about as if to ascertain that the street was deserted. Then he slipped into the shop, closing the door behind him.

CHAPTER

22

GHOSTS OF THE PAST

"PETER FENESTRA," murmured Louise. "Can there be any doubt that he is the customer Ellis Saal meant?"

"Not in my opinion," rejoined Penny.

"Isn't it possible that he went into the shop to have a photograph taken, or for some other reason?"

"Possible but not probable. No, Lou, we should have guessed long ago that Fenestra is an ex-sailor. It's all becoming clear now."

"Then I wish you would explain to me."

"Don't you see? Anchor Joe, John Munn, Fenestra, and perhaps a fourth man must have been good friends at one time. They had their tattoos with that phrase, *All for one, one for all,* pricked on their backs. Then Fenestra must have done something which made the others angry. They followed him here to get even with him."

"What makes you think that?" Louise asked dubiously.

"Anchor Joe gave us a good broad hint. Then we know that he and at least one other man have kept watch of the Fenestra farm."

"What can the man have done to offend them?"

"I can't guess that part," admitted Penny. "Another thing, why should Fenestra decide to have his octopus tattoo removed?"

"And who pushed John Munn off the bridge?" Louise added. "We're as much in the dark as ever."

"Not quite," amended Penny. "I feel that if only we could get into that storm cave, we might learn the answer to some of our questions."

"You're not thinking of investigating it tonight?"

Penny shook her head. "I can't without Dad's permission. It's a pity, too, because I know a big story is awaiting me, if only I could go out there and get it."

"I'm sure of one thing. We'll never dare print a word against Fenestra without absolute proof."

"No," agreed Penny, her eyebrows knitting in a frown, " it would lead to legal trouble."

Deciding that nothing more could be learned by waiting, the girls returned to the parked car. Motoring toward Louise's home, they discussed various angles of the baffling case. Confronting them always was the fact that Peter Fenestra's reputation in Riverview was

excellent, while Anchor Joe and John Munn appeared to be persons of questionable character.

"You never learned why Joe was wanted by the authorities?" Louise inquired, alighting at her doorstep.

"No, I haven't seen Mr. Moyer since that day at the cottage. I'm reasonably sure Joe is still at liberty."

"He may be the one at the bottom of all the trouble," declared Louise. "We tend to suspect Fenestra of evil doing because we dislike him so heartily."

"That's so, Lou. The best way is to have no opinions and wait for facts. But waiting wears me to a frazzle!"

After parting from her chum, Penny did not drive home. Instead, she turned into Drexel Boulevard, and presently was ringing the doorbell of the Judson home.

The door was opened by Matthew Judson. Penny had not expected to meet the former publisher. Somewhat confusedly she inquired for Pauletta.

"My daughter isn't here now," replied Mr. Judson. "I expect her home within a few minutes. Won't you wait?"

"No, thank you," Penny declined. "I'll drop in some other time."

"I wish you would stay," urged Mr. Judson. "I find an empty house so depressing."

Penny hesitated, and then followed the former publisher to the living room. Mr. Judson had been reading the newspaper. He swept it from a chair so that the girl could sit opposite him.

"Tell me how you are getting on with your newspaper," he urged in a friendly tone.

Penny talked entertainingly, relating the various difficulties which beset a young publisher.

"I've even received threatening notes," she revealed. "Or rather, one. I think it was left on my desk by a man named Peter Fenestra."

"Fenestra?" Mr. Judson's face darkened.

"Yes," answered Penny, watching the publisher attentively. "Do you know him?"

"Only by reputation. He's a scoundrel!" His voice grew quite intense.

"Can you tell me anything definite against him?"

"No—no, I can't. I only advise you to have nothing whatsoever to do with him."

The telephone rang and Mr. Judson arose to answer it. During his absence, Penny thought swiftly. Dared she mention the clipping which she had found in the publisher's desk? She did not wish to antagonize him, yet there were many questions she longed to ask.

Mr. Judson presently returned. Penny decided to risk his anger.

Casually she introduced the subject by mentioning

that she was using Mr. Judson's former office and desk as her own.

"Yesterday I came upon a clipping caught beneath the lower drawer," she said quietly. "It concerned a man named Matthew Jewel. He bore a striking resemblance to you."

The publisher raised his eyes to stare intently at Penny. His hands gripped the chair arms so hard that the knuckles became a bluish-white. Splotches of red appeared on his forehead.

"Matthew Jewel?" he murmured at last.

"Yes, Mr. Judson, but you have nothing to fear from me. I shall not expose you."

"Then you know?"

"The likeness was unmistakable. I read the clipping, too."

The publisher arose, nervously walking to the fireplace. His hands trembled as he fingered an ornament on the shelf.

"I searched everywhere for that clipping when I cleaned out my desk," he mumbled. "I've gone through every imaginable torture fearing it would be found. And now I am to be exposed!"

"But I assure you I have no intention of telling anyone," said Penny earnestly. "Your past is your own."

"A man's past never is his own," responded Mr. Judson bitterly.

"I shouldn't have mentioned it. I hoped I might be able to help you."

"You haven't told Pauletta?"

"No, nor any other person."

Mr. Judson's tenseness relaxed slightly. He paced across the room and back, then faced Penny.

"All my life," he said very quietly, "I have tried to spare Pauletta the knowledge that her father was—a convict. I haven't much to offer, but I'll give anything within reason to keep the story out of the paper."

"You don't understand," interrupted Penny. "I have no intention of printing the information, or of telling anyone. I want nothing from you. But I do wish you would tell me the true story. I am sure there were extenuating circumstances."

Mr. Judson sagged into an armchair. "None," he said. "None whatsoever. I used money which did not belong to me. My wife was desperately sick at the time and I wanted her to have the care of specialists. She died while I was serving my sentence."

"Why, you did have a reason for taking the money," said Penny kindly. "You should have been granted a pardon."

"A theft is a theft. When I left prison, I made a new start here, and devoted myself to Pauletta who was then a little girl."

"How old was she?" inquired Penny.

Mr. Judson gave no indication that he heard the question. He resumed:

"The truth had been kept from Pauletta. She believes that I was abroad during those years I spent in prison. Here in Riverview I prospered, people were kind to me. I made money and made it honestly. The future was very bright until a year ago."

"Then you gave up your newspaper," commented Penny. "Why?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Blackmail?"

Mr. Judson nodded. "One day a man came to me, a man I had known in prison. He threatened to expose me unless I paid him a large sum of money."

"And you agreed?"

"I did."

"Wasn't that rather foolish? People would have been charitable if you had admitted the truth."

"I considered it from every angle, particularly from Pauletta's standpoint. I gave the man what he asked, although it cost me the *Morning Press*. But that was not the end."

"He still bothers you?"

"Yes, I'll pay as long as I have a penny. I've thought of taking Pauletta and going away, but he would trace me."

"Who is the man, Mr. Judson?"

"I can't tell you."

"Is it either Anchor Joe Landa or Peter Fenestra?"

Mr. Judson's face did not alter. "I can't tell you," he repeated.

"I wish you would talk to Dad," Penny said after a moment. "He might be able to help you."

"No," returned Mr. Judson, growing agitated again, "you gave your promise that you would not tell."

"Of course, I'll keep it," responded Penny. "It does seem to me, though, that the easiest thing would be to admit the truth and be rid of the man who robs you. Pauletta would understand."

Mr. Judson shook his head. "I have made my decision," he said. "As long as I can, I shall abide by it."

There was nothing Penny could do but bid Mr. Judson good evening and leave the house. His secret troubled her. If he had told her the entire truth, it seemed very foolish of him to meet the demands of a blackmailer.

"I wonder if Mr. Judson did tell me everything?" she mused. "I had a feeling that he was keeping something back."

The car rolled into the driveway of the Parker home. As Penny jumped out to open the garage doors, a man, who had been sitting on the back doorstep, arose. His face was hidden, but she knew it was not her father.

"Who is it?" she called uneasily.

The voice was reassuring. "It's Horney, Miss Penny. I've been waitin' for you."

"What brings you here?" she asked, hurrying to meet him. "I hope nothing bad has happened at the *Times*."

"Everything's fine there. I've got a letter I thought you would want to see right away. Found it tonight when I was sweeping up. It answers a lot of questions you've been askin'."

Penny took the paper from Old Horney's gnarled hand. "Not about Matthew Judson?" she asked.

"Read it and you'll see," encouraged the pressman. "Judson was blackmailed just as I always thought. And by the man who signed this letter."

CHAPTER

23

PENNY'S PLIGHT

IT WAS too dark for Penny to read the letter. Stepping to the car, she switched on the headlights and held the paper in its brilliant beam.

The letter read:

> Dear Matthew:
>
> Sorry to bother you again, Old Pal, but I know you're always willing to give an old buddy and cellmate a helping hand. I don't want to tip off the New York cops where you are, and you can trust me to keep mum if you come through with another six thousand. This is my last request.
>
> Peter F.

"Peter Fenestra!" exclaimed Penny. "And it's no surprise either! Horney, where did you find this letter?"

"It was in a pile of rubbish down in the basement. I don't know how it got there."

"Peter Fenestra has a habit of leaving notes on Mr. Judson's desk," declared Penny. "This one may have blown off and been swept out without the publisher seeing it!"

"Don't you figure it's a blackmail attempt?"

"Of course it is, Horney. You've not shown the letter to anyone?"

"Only to you. From the threat I dope it out that Judson was sent to prison years ago, and he's still wanted."

Penny nodded as she placed the letter in her pocketbook. His guess was a shrewd one, but she could tell him nothing without breaking her promise to Mr. Judson.

"Horney," she said, "a great deal hinges upon this letter. You'll not tell anyone what you've learned?"

"Oh, I'll keep it to myself. I'm not one to get Judson into trouble. He's had enough of it already."

Penny noticed that her father's car was not in the garage. She reasoned that since he had not come home he must be working late at the *Star* office as he frequently did.

"Jump in, Horney," she invited, swinging wide the car door. "I'm going downtown to find Dad. I'll give you a ride."

She was grateful that the pressman had little to say as they sped through dimly lighted residential streets.

How much he suspected she could only guess. But the letter had made it clear to her that the former publisher never had completed his prison sentence.

"That was why he didn't answer me when I asked about Pauletta's age!" she thought. "He must have escaped from prison soon after he was sent there!"

No longer did Penny wonder why Mr. Judson had not refused Peter Fenestra's repeated demands for money. Obviously he had feared a far worse fate than exposure—return to the New York state prison.

The car turned into the deserted *Star* loading dock. Few lights were visible in the building, for the day staff had gone home and only the scrub women were at work. Penny could not see the windows of her father's office from the street. Nor did she observe a man who slouched against a wall, not far from where the car had stopped.

Old Horney stepped from the running board, thanking Penny for the ride.

"Guess I'll amble up the street and get a cup of coffee."

"You'll be sure not to mention the letter?" Penny reminded him.

"I won't tell a soul. You know, I was thinkin' about it as we rode downtown. Peter Fenestra came into the office a couple of times just before Judson closed the plant. He was a dirty blackmailer, all right! Wouldn't

that letter I gave you be enough to send him up?"

"I should think so, Horney. But the problem is how to take care of him without ruining Mr. Judson."

"Better show the letter to your father," advised the pressman. "Maybe he'll have some ideas."

Tipping his hat, Old Horney moved briskly away.

Penny entered the rear vestibule, speaking to three scrub women who were locking up their cleaning equipment before leaving the building. Not even the elevator man was on duty, so she climbed the stairs. Switching on a light in the newsroom, she passed through it to her father's office.

The room was dark.

"Not here," thought Penny. "I was afraid of it."

Deciding to telephone home, she entered one of the glass enclosed booths at the end of the newsroom. As she lifted the receiver, a voice from behind her said distinctly:

"Put that down!"

Startled, Penny whirled around. Peter Fenestra stood in the doorway of the booth.

"Come out of there!" he ordered harshly.

Penny obeyed with alacrity as she tried to gather her wits. The building was practically deserted, and Fenestra took care to stand between her and the outside door.

"What do you want here?" she demanded coldly.

"The letter."

Penny stared at him blankly. Her astonishment was genuine.

"Don't pretend you don't know," Fenestra said harshly. "I want the letter you and that old man were talking about."

"Oh!" Light broke upon Penny. "So you heard our conversation! You were listening!"

"I happened to be standing in the loading dock. I know you have the letter. Hand it over."

Penny backed a few steps away toward her father's office. "So you admit you wrote it?" she challenged.

"I admit nothing. But I want that letter."

"You'll not get it," Penny defied him. "Peter Fenestra, you were the one who put that warning note on my desk a few days ago! And I know why, too! You were afraid I'd learn too much about the octopus tattoo. Well, I've learned plenty!"

Fenestra's face became contorted with rage. He choked, "You've been down in the cave!" and started toward Penny.

Thoroughly frightened, she eluded his grasp. Running into her father's office, she slammed the door. Bracing her body against it, she managed to turn the key before Fenestra could force it open.

"Come out of there!" he shouted furiously. "Come out, I say!"

"And I say I won't!" retorted Penny. "Just try to get in!"

She pushed her father's heavy desk across the room, placing it in front of the door.

Fenestra rattled the handle several times, and threw his body against the panel once or twice. Then she heard footsteps as he walked away.

"That's only a trick to get me to come out," thought Penny. "I won't be stupid enough to fall into his trap. I'll stay right here."

Walking to the window, she gazed down. Cars were passing along the street. If she shouted for help someone might hear her. However, to explain her predicament would be rather awkward.

Penny's gaze fell upon the telephone which had fallen from the desk to the floor. Picking it up, she dialed the number of her own house. Mrs. Weems answered.

"Hello," said Penny cheerfully, "Dad hasn't come home yet by any chance?"

"He's just now driving into the garage," the housekeeper replied. "I'll call him."

A moment later Penny heard her father's voice at the other end of the wire.

"Dad," she said, "I'm down at your office, sitting behind some barbed wire entanglements. I wish you'd get a policeman and see what you can do about rescuing me."

"Is this one of your jokes?" Mr. Parker demanded.

Fearful that her father would hang up the receiver, Penny talked fast and to the point. Mr. Parker assured her he would come without a moment's delay.

"I guess that will teach Peter Fenestra not to get funny with me!" she congratulated herself. "It pays to do a little thinking. Fenestra will be arrested, and then I'll drive out and learn what he hides in his cave."

Penny sniffed the air. She could smell smoke, and she thought it must be coming from a cigarette. Evidently Fenestra had stolen to the door and was patiently waiting for her to emerge.

"He'll have a long wait," she chuckled.

Gradually her elation died. The odor of smoke had grown stronger. She saw a wisp of it filter beneath the door crack. Penny's heart caught in her throat. Tensely she listened. Was it imagination or could she hear the crackle of flames?

"Fenestra may be burning the papers of a scrap basket just to smoke me out," she thought. "Probably that's just what he's doing."

Pulling the heavy desk away from the door, she

stood with her ear against the panel. Distinctly she could hear the crackle of flames. The wood felt warm to her cheek.

Suddenly Penny was afraid. Frantically she turned the key in the lock.

The door swung outward to the pressure of her shoulder. A wave of heat rushed in.

Penny staggered backward, horrified by the sight which met her eyes. At the end of the newsroom, where the exit should have been, rose a towering barrier of flames.

CHAPTER

24

A BARRIER OF FLAMES

ESCAPE THROUGH the newsroom was cut off. Panic seized Penny, but only for an instant. Retreating, she telephoned the fire department. Then finding a chemical extinguisher, she began fighting the flames.

Black, rolling smoke billowed into her face, choking and blinding her. The heat drove her back.

From far down the street came the wail of a siren. Penny rushed to a window. A pumper and a hook-and-ladder truck swung around the corner, lurching to a stop.

Raising the sash, she stepped out onto the ledge, waving to the men below.

"Stay where you are!" shouted a fireman. "We'll get you!"

A ladder shot up, but Penny did not wait to be carried to safety. Before a fireman could mount, she scrambled down with the agility of a monkey.

"The fire started in the newsroom," she gasped. "But

it's already spread into the composing department."

"Anyone else in the building?"

"I don't think so. There were three scrub women, but they're probably out now."

Lines of hose were stretched to the hydrants, and streams of water began to play on the flames. A crowd, following in the wake of the fire engines, was ordered back by the police. One young man broke through, darting to Penny's side.

"Jerry!" she exclaimed.

"Gosh, how did it start?" he demanded. "Why, Penny, your hair is singed!"

"I was in it," she said briefly. "I can't explain now, but the fire was started by Peter Fenestra."

"On purpose?"

"I don't know about that. He was smoking a cigarette."

"Have you told the police?"

"Not yet. I'm waiting for Dad."

A car inched through the crowd, stopping a few yards away. Mr. Parker leaped out and ran toward the burning building. He was stopped at the entrance by a fireman.

"Let me in there!" the publisher shouted, trying to free himself. "My daughter's inside!"

"No, here I am, Dad!" Penny cried, grasping his hand.

Mr. Parker said no word, but he pulled her to him in a rough embrace. The next moment he was trying once more to enter the building, intending to save important papers.

"Take it easy, Parker," advised the fireman, barring the door with his hose. "The smoke's bad in there."

"Will the building go?"

"We'll save most of it," the fireman assured him confidently.

Penny plucked at her father's sleeve. "Dad, oughtn't the police be sent after Peter Fenestra? He's responsible for this, and a lot of other things, too!"

"You mean Fenestra set the fire?"

Above the roar of flames, Penny tersely disclosed how the man had compelled her to take refuge in the inner office room. Jerry also heard the story, and when she had finished, he said to Mr. Parker:

"Chief, let me take a couple of policemen and nail that fellow! Maybe we can arrest him at the farm before he makes a get-away."

"Go ahead," urged Mr. Parker.

"I'm going along," declared Penny, and darted away before her father could stop her.

Twenty minutes later, with a police cruiser dispatched to Fenestra's place, she and Jerry drove there in Mr. Parker's car. Parking some distance down the road, they walked cautiously toward the farmhouse

which loomed dark against the sky. No lights burned in the windows. The grounds appeared deserted.

"Looks as if Fenestra isn't here," observed Jerry. "No use waiting for the police."

Boldly going to the front door he pounded on it, ordering in a loud voice: "Open up!"

"He's not here," said Penny after a moment. "Unless perhaps he's hiding."

"The place looks deserted to me."

Penny glanced toward the storm cave, remembering that she had the key to the padlock in her pocket. Jerry read her thought, and followed as she went quickly toward the mound.

"It's locked," he said, indicating the padlock.

"Here's the key." Eagerly Penny offered it to Jerry. "I'm sure this must be the one."

The reporter gave her a flashlight to hold while he tried to fit the key into the lock.

"It's no go, Penny."

"But I was so sure, Jerry." She stooped to examine the padlock. "Well, no wonder! It's been changed."

"Then we're out of luck until the police get here."

"Isn't there any way we can open it ourselves?"

"Maybe I can break it."

"There should be tools in the barn, Jerry."

"I'll see what I can find."

Leaving Penny, the reporter disappeared in the di-

rection of the barn. Extinguishing the flashlight, she patiently waited.

Suddenly she was startled to hear running footsteps. Barely had she crouched behind the storm cave before a man emerged from among the pine trees adjoining the road. It was Peter Fenestra and he was breathing hard.

Straight toward the cave he ran. Pausing at the slanting door, he peered quickly about, and then fumbled with the padlock. In desperate haste he jerked it loose, swung back the hinged door, and descended the stone steps.

Penny waited a moment, then crept to the entrance. Fenestra had not taken time to lower the door behind him. A light shone from an underground room at one side of the main passageway, and she could hear the man's heavy boots scuffing on a cement floor.

Penny considered going after Jerry and decided against it. Fenestra's frantic haste suggested that he might not linger long in the cave. What could he be doing beneath ground?

With Jerry so near, she felt that it would not be too dangerous to investigate. Warily she tiptoed down the steps.

A low, rounding doorway opened from the descending passage. Peering into the dimly lighted room, Penny did not immediately see Peter Fenestra.

Instead her gaze roved about the walls of what appeared to be a workshop. Tools were neatly arranged over a bench, while a cupboard of shelves contained miscellaneous mechanical parts.

At the far end of the cave stood an urn-like contrivance which the girl took to be an electric furnace. An armored cable ran from it to a heavy wall switch having two blades and a sizable wooden handle. Plainly it was designed to carry a very heavy current.

Peter Fenestra came from behind the furnace. Penny saw him throw the switch. Almost immediately she heard a low hissing sound from the interior of the metal oven. Slowly the furnace heated, and soon glowed weirdly.

As she pondered what the man could be intending to do, she heard a slight sound at the stairway entrance. Thinking that Jerry had returned, she started up the steps. Not one figure but three loomed in the doorway!

Penny flattened herself against the dirt wall. But she could not avoid being seen. A flashlight beam focused upon her, and the next instant a revolver muzzle bit into her side.

"Keep quiet!" she was ordered in a whisper. "You won't be hurt!"

Penny stared into the grim face of Anchor Joe. Behind him came John Munn, and a man she had never

seen before. In a flash she knew why they were there —to avenge themselves upon Peter Fenestra.

Quietly as the men had moved, they had been heard in the next room.

"Who's there?" Fenestra called sharply.

John Munn and Anchor Joe stepped into the rectangle of light, their revolvers trained upon the man.

"Just three of your old pals, Otto," drawled Anchor Joe. "Reach!"

"Listen, Joe, you got me all wrong," Peter Fenestra whined. "I can explain why I kept the gold. I'll give it all to you if that's what you want. I'll do anything—don't shoot."

"Shootin' would be too good for you," retorted Anchor Joe. "We got other plans." His face was dark with rage.

"Sure, we know how to deal with a traitor," added John Munn, deftly whisking a revolver from Fenestra's hip pocket. "You thought you could hide from us. You thought by changing your name, and coming to this out-of-the-way town you could fool us. Why, you dirty rat, you even thought you could get by with pushing me off a bridge!"

"Your greed kept you here," taunted Anchor Joe. "You couldn't bear to leave any of those gold bars behind."

"You thought you'd melt down the last of 'em to-

night and skip," added John Munn. "You're goin' on a long trip all right, but with us!"

A pair of steel cuffs were slipped over Fenestra's wrists. Speedily, the sailors searched the cave, gathering up several bags of what Penny assumed to be gold.

"How about this bar?" John Munn asked his companions. "Can we handle it?"

"Too heavy," answered Anchor Joe. "With Moyer hot on our trail, we've got to travel light. Get going and I'll follow."

Munn and his companion marched Peter Fenestra from the cave. Taking a cord from his pocket, Anchor Joe bound Penny's hands and feet.

"I'm tying 'em loose," he said. "And I'll leave the cave door open. After we're gone you can yell for help."

"Joe, where are you taking Fenestra? What has he done?"

The sailor did not answer. Seizing a bag of gold, he slung it over his shoulder and went quickly up the stairs. Penny was left in the darkness.

CHAPTER

25

SAILORS' REVENGE

MINUTES LATER, Jerry, returning from the barn, heard Penny's muffled scream for help. Descending into the cave he immediately freed her and learned what had happened.

"Fenestra used this furnace for melting down gold all right!" he exclaimed, peering into the dark cavern. "Wonder where he got it?"

"It must be stolen gold—government gold, perhaps," gasped Penny. "Jerry, those men have been gone only a minute or two!"

"Then maybe we can get 'em yet!"

Jerry had heard an automobile turn into the yard. Hopeful that it might be the awaited authorities, he and Penny ran up the stone steps. To their joy they saw that it was the police cruiser.

In terse sentences they told their story to the officers. Penny had no idea which direction the men had gone, but the reporter recalled having seen a group

of four walking toward the river just as he had left the barn.

With Jerry and Penny standing on the running board, the police car headed in the direction of the Big Bear. Suddenly a series of explosive sounds were heard, staccato noises similar to the back-firing of an automobile exhaust.

"Shots!" exclaimed Jerry. "From the river, too!"

The car drew to a halt. The policemen leaped out and started across the fields. Disregarding orders to remain behind, Penny and Jerry followed.

Breathlessly, they reached the rim of the river. A beam of light directed their gaze to the opposite shore. A high-powered motor boat had pulled away and was fast gathering speed. Flashes of gunfire from its decks were answered by the revolvers of men on the river bank.

Shielding Penny with his body, Jerry drew her behind a tree. In a moment as the motor boat passed beyond range, firing ceased. Then they slid down the bank to learn what had occurred.

Penny saw that Peter Fenestra had been captured. He was handcuffed to Mr. Moyer, and she instantly guessed that the other four men were government operatives.

"Find a boat and start after those three sailors who

got away!" Moyer ordered his men tersely. "I'll take this fellow to town."

Penny edged forward, obtaining an excellent view of Peter Fenestra's downcast face. Quietly she made her accusations, telling of the cave where she had been imprisoned.

"So that was how the gold was melted down," commented Moyer.

He then explained that for days his operatives had watched the river where they knew Anchor Joe had hidden a motorboat. Surprised in the act of taking off, the sailors had exchanged shots with the government men, but by abandoning Fenestra and the gold, they had escaped.

"This man's real name is Otto Franey," Moyer revealed, indicating Fenestra. "He and the three sailors were shipmates aboard the *Dorasky*."

"They're wanted for stealing gold?" questioned Penny.

"Yes, they got away with four gold bars taken from the *Dorasky*. You see, about a year ago a consignment of gold was shipped by a Swiss bank to the New York Federal Reserve. Because of heavy fog the bars were unloaded at the pier instead of being taken off at Quarantine. They were removed in a sling and dumped on the wharf to await the mail truck."

"And the four sailors saw a chance to steal some of the bars?" questioned Jerry.

"Yes, how they accomplished it we don't know. But hours later a mail driver refused to sign for one of the bags because it had been slit open. Four bars valued at approximately fourteen thousand dollars each were missing. Investigation disclosed that a sailor, Otto Franey, had jumped ship. A few days later Joe Landa, John Munn and Jack Guenther also disappeared."

"Each man was marked with an octopus tattoo, wasn't he?" Penny inquired eagerly.

"Yes, although I did not learn that until a day or so ago. Otto has been trying to get his tattoo removed so that it would be harder to trace him. The four sailors had their backs marked with an octopus design and words which read, *All for one, one for all,* when put together. They were feeling very friendly toward each other at that time."

"Then I was right!" exclaimed Penny. "And the four conspired to steal the gold bars?"

"Otto was entrusted by his pals to dispose of the stolen gold. Instead, he gave them the slip and tried to keep it for himself. Evidently he rigged up a furnace and melted the metal into useable form. But the three sailors trailed him here, determined to avenge themselves."

As Fenestra was hustled to a waiting car, Penny told

Mr. Moyer everything she knew about the prisoner, save his connection with Matthew Judson. Deliberately she withheld information about the blackmail plot.

While the prisoner was being loaded into the government car, another automobile drew up nearby. Recognizing Mr. Parker at the wheel, Penny and Jerry ran to tell him the latest news.

"Full speed ahead, Chief!" exclaimed the reporter, sliding into the front seat. "We've got a big story by the tail!"

"A lot of good it does us," responded the publisher gloomily.

"You mean the firemen failed to save the *Star* building?" Penny asked anxiously.

"The building's saved, but considerable damage was done by fire and water. We can't use the plant for several days. It's enough to make a man ill! Scooped by the opposition when the story is ours!"

"You forget the little *Weekly Times*," reminded Penny. "Old Horney has everything ready to roll. I'm turning the plant over to you."

"To me?" Mr. Parker did not understand her meaning.

"Yes, gather your mechanical force. The plant's yours for the night."

"Penny, you're the tops!" the publisher exclaimed,

starting the car with a lurch. "Together we'll get out an extra that will be an extra!"

After that Penny lost all sense of time as events transpired with rapidity and precision. As if by magic the staff of the *Star* appeared to take over the *Times* plant. The building shook off its lethargy and machinery began to turn.

Allowing Jerry to write the big story, Penny tried to be everywhere at once. She fluttered at Dewitt's elbow as he drew a dummy of the front page.

"Let's make it 96-point type," she urged. "Splashy! A double column story with a break-over to page three."

"Anything you say," was Dewitt's surprising answer.

In the composing room, printers were locking the forms, using pages previously made ready for the next issue of the *Weekly Times*. Stereotypers were testing the pneumatic steam tables. Pressmen under Old Horney's direction oiled the double-deck rotaries and tightened bolts.

At last came the moment when the starter plate was fitted into place on the cylinder. With a half turn of a T wrench Old Horney made it secure.

"She's ready," he announced, flashing the signal light. "You push the button, Penny."

Trembling with excitement, she started the press

rolling. Faster and faster it went. In a moment papers dropped so swiftly from the folder that her eye could not follow. A conveyer carried them upward over the presses to the distributing room.

Mr. Parker offered Penny a paper, smiling as he saw her stare at the nameplate. Instead of the *Star* it read: *The Weekly Times.*

"Why, Dad!" she exclaimed. "They've made a mistake."

"It's no mistake," he corrected. "This is your extra. Your name appears as Managing Editor."

"So that was why Dewitt was so agreeable to all my suggestions?" she laughed. "I might have guessed."

Later, while newsboys cried their wares, Penny and her father sat in the private office, talking with Matthew Judson. From his own lips they learned how he had submitted to blackmail rather than disgrace Pauletta by returning to prison.

"Your case is a deserving one," Mr. Parker told him kindly. "I assure you we'll never publish the story, and I'll do everything in my power to help you obtain a pardon."

Before leaving the office, Mr. Judson promised Penny he would tell his daughter the truth, allowing her to break her engagement to Major Atchley if she chose.

"We'll go away somewhere," he said. "California,

perhaps. Although I'll never try to publish a paper again, at least my life will cease to be a torment."

Alone with her father once more, Penny had two requests to make.

"Name them," he urged.

"Can you get Tillie Fellows a job?"

"Easily."

"And will you take Horney into your own plant?"

"I'll be glad to do it as soon as the *Star* operates again. Until remodeling work is completed I have no plant."

"Yes, you have, Dad. This building is yours if you can make arrangements with Mr. Veeley."

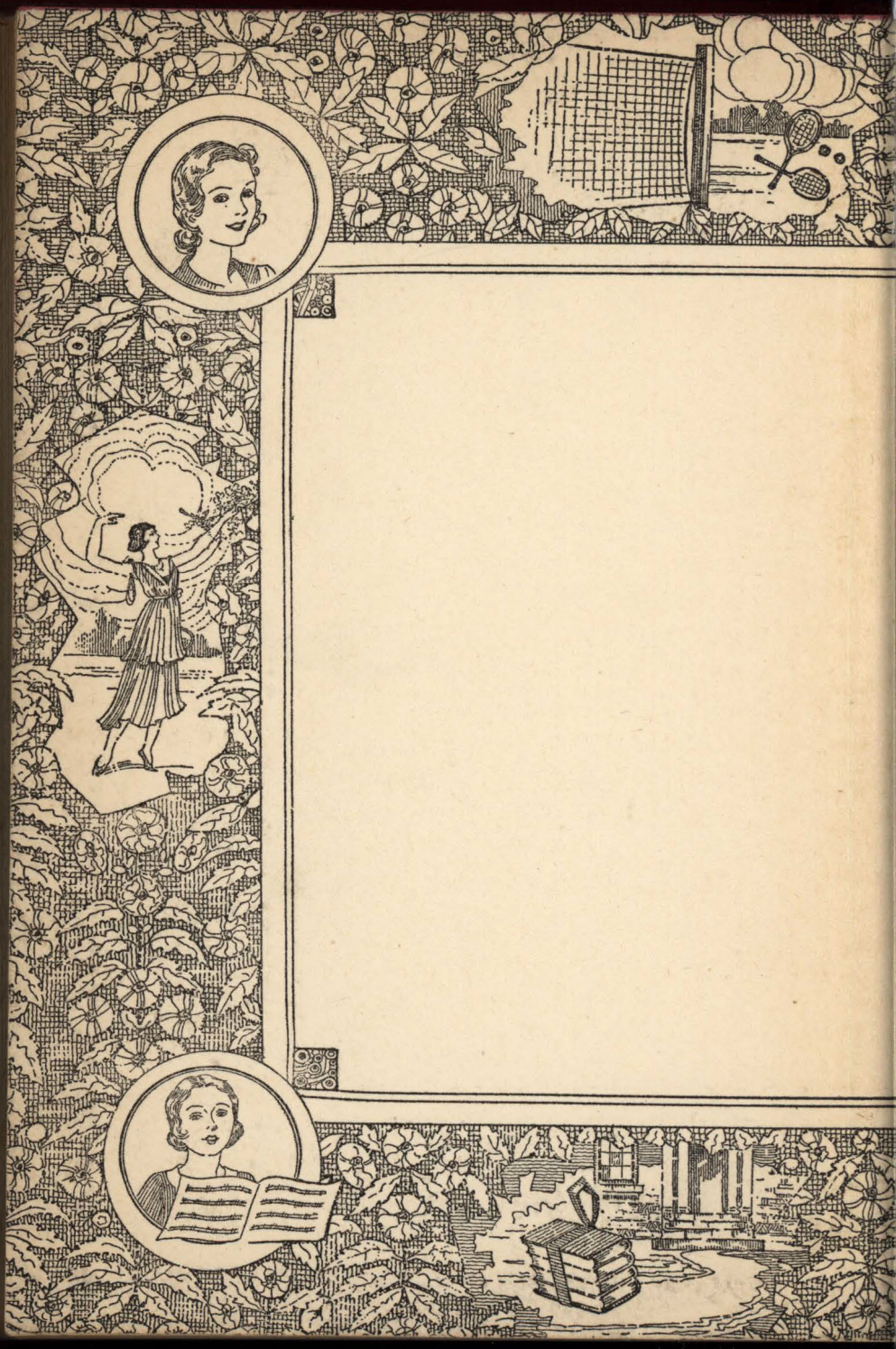
"Penny! You're willing to give up the *Weekly?*"

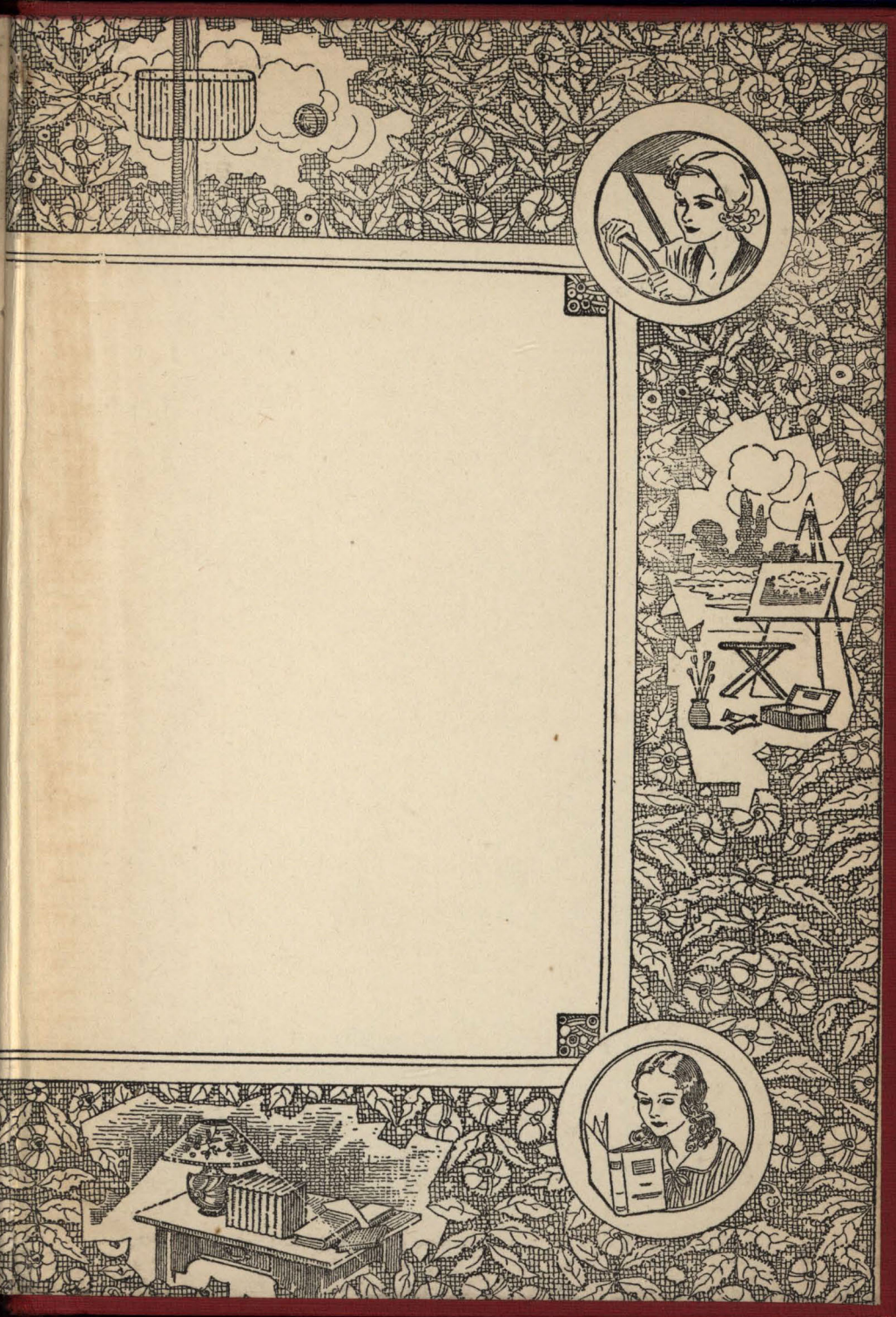
"Willing?" she laughed. "I'm hilariously crazy to get rid of it. Matters have reached a state where either I must abandon the paper or my education. I've only awaited a chance to end my career in a blaze of glory."

"A blaze expresses it very mildly," smiled Mr. Parker. "In all modesty, let us say a conflagration!"

"Oh, why be modest?" grinned Penny. "Let's come right out and call it a holocaust! That's the strongest word I know."

THE END





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